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The Humanism of the Bible

A SERIES OF VOLUMES

EDITED BY

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RELIGION IN SONG

RELIGION IN SONG

OR

STUDIES IN THE PSALTER

BY

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LONDON

JAMES CLARKE & CO., 13 & 14 FLEET STREET, E.C.

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PREFACE

IN a series on "The Humanism of the Bible" the Psalter can surely claim a place; it is one of the greatest human documents, preserving for us one of the most important links between Hebrew Religion and the Christian Faith. However much difference of opinion there may be as to the date of particular psalms, it is clear that as a whole the book stands between the earliest histories and sermons and the later Jewish non-canonical literature. At a time when the Jewish Church concentrated much energy on law and ritual, it expressed the more spiritual side of religion, and bears testimony to a deepening of personal religious experience. It is based upon the revelations of the past, but it speaks out of a living present, and bears witness to a living God crying, "To-day if ye would hear His voice."

It may seem to be an audacious rather than a wise thing to attempt to deal with a collection of one hundred and fifty poems in a book of such small compass. It means, of course, that a detailed and individual treatment by way of comment or paraphrase is out of the question; consequently the present writer has had to adopt a mixture of methods, giving in some chapters introductory materials that may help to a clearer view of the whole, in others a review of groups of psalms, while in others again an

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attempt is made to expound more fully poems that set forth central and fundamental experiences of those ancient singers. From the point of view of completeness and symmetry such a programme may be unsatisfactory, but it is hoped that there may be compensations in the way of simple suggestions that the student can follow out on his own account. A brief bibliography is given in which only accessible books in English have been included. Learned commentaries and expositions there are in abundance open to those who have the requisite knowledge and leisure, but it is hoped that this sketchy treatment may be found helpful to those who, with less time at their disposal, are interested in the structure and spirit of this wonderful book. The writer remembers well the inspiration he received as a student from the late Professor W. G. Elmslie in his treatment of a few important psalms, and he will be grateful if in a less brilliant fashion he can render to others a similar service.

Queen's University,
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W. G. JORDAN.

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CHAPTER I

AFTER THE EXILE

AFTER many years of keen discussion the great body of scholarly opinion has settled down to the view that, as a whole, the Psalter is a post-exilic book ; some of the songs may belong to an earlier time, but this is uncertain, while it seems quite clear that the collection of poems represents the religious and literary activity of the later Jewish Church. Let us try to set forth briefly what this statement means. Hebrew history and literature, as reflected in the Old Testament, cover a period of about twelve hundred years ; the Babylonian Exile, to which we now refer, comes in the middle of that long period. Thoughtful readers do not need to be warned not to attach a too rigid significance to this word " period." Life is always in movement ; the history of the world is one continuous action, a drama with many related acts and scenes. The nations that have what can really be called " history " have influenced each other and made their separate contributions to the general life of the world. The life and history of little Israel is set in the general framework of the world's life ; in the earliest times we find the living principle of the new religion manifesting its power in binding together tribes whose characteristic features and

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common beliefs were much like those of other Semitic peoples. Twelve centuries later, when Judaism had run its original course and was in part stereotyped into a fixed form, and in part merged into the new Christian religion, this was the result of a process which with all its rude contrasts and fierce contentions had been continuous through all that time, and still the old life flowed on in the new forms ; but with all that is common to Judaism and Christianity, the life and teaching of our Lord, as we interpret it, marks distinctly the beginning of a new era.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of many Jews to Babylon early in the Sixth Century B.C., is also one of the most important breaks in the national life of Israel. It divides the story into two almost equal periods. Before the Exile we speak of the Hebrew people, in their tribal history, and in the two Kingdoms of Judah and Israel ; after the Exile we have to do with a small community, with its centre in Jerusalem, that is more of a church than a nation. In one sense we may say that the golden age of Hebrew literature is in the earlier period, the noblest narratives and most powerful sermons came from the time when the nations were strong and active in the political sense ; but the later time has more literary activity. In 721 B.C., Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, suffered conquest at the hands of the Assyrians, and many Israelites were taken captive and their places filled by foreign settlers (2 Kings xvii. 24). That Exile left its mark in pro-

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ducing a mongrel people, and later a religious schism with lasting bitterness (Neh. iv., John iv.). The main stream of religious life and thought remained with the Kingdom of Judah, and before the fatal day came for Jerusalem in the Babylonian conquest, the community had had the advantage of prophetic ministry and priestly reform, which has left its enduring monument on the legal side in the book of Deuteronomy.

So it came to pass that when the Babylonian conqueror, Nebuchadrezzar, carried away many of the best of the people and finally laid the temple and the sacred city in ruins, there was a spiritual life that national death could not destroy. Ezekiel's hopes of a glorious resurrection were amply justified (Ezek. xxxvii.) though his ministry among the exiles often appeared to be hopeless. The Evangel of the Old Testament (Isa. xl.-lv.), written at this time by an unknown poet, comes from a more cloistered sphere than that of Ezekiel and is full of sweet consoling songs. The problem facing the people was, How could a religion intensely national in its character preserve its life in a distant alien land, on "unclean soil," without the help of temple and sacrifices (Ps. cxxxvii.)? We with our modern conceptions of cosmopolitanism, the universality and spirituality of religion, cannot realise the power of the shock in an age when religion was so thoroughly rooted in the soil. On individuals the effect must have been various; some clung with firmer grasp to ancient customs while others lost their hold on the national faith, but those to whom the world owes a special

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debt of gratitude were those who saved themselves and their religion by learning that the power and presence of their God broke through national boundaries, and that even in the enemy's land the broken spirit and the contrite heart might offer living sacrifice.

We have no detailed picture of the settlements in Babylonia, but we know that the Jews lived in communities and preserved a separate life. How many returned to the old home we do not know exactly, but it is clear that those who returned to Judæa and those who remained in Babylon looked with love and hope to Jerusalem, and contributed out of their substance and their faith to rebuild the temple and restore the Church. It was natural that they should gather their ancient documents and study the story of the past, and try to understand more fully the demands of their law. The need and power of teaching already emphasised in Deuteronomy (xi. 19) became more prominent in the absence of sacrificial feasts and temple services. The book begins to take a prominent position, to gather around itself the atmosphere of sanctity, to serve as a kind of portable temple, and to become a centre of influence in places where there could be no temple or altar of sacrifice. They did not know that this book was to go round the world, and speak in all human tongues; all they knew was that they must tell to their children the story of God's wondrous dealings; because of their faithfulness to the God-given light, to them has been given a large posterity in many lands. The Jew at this period became more

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of a trader ; torn from his own soil, and linked by less sacred ties to other lands, a movement began, which is not yet ended, by which the Jew entered into the life of almost all other nations. Our business however, is not with economic conditions but with that phase of human life that we call theology, thought about God and the world. We know that great thoughts, which we are about to study in the Psalter, were at this time and place adapted to new needs. The judgment predicted by the prophets was accepted in the spirit of submission and made the basis of new hope. The old history was re-written under this new light. The Sabbath and circumcision, tokens of the covenant and signs of separation, received greater significance and sanctity; alongside of large claims for the universal power of their religion there grew an intolerance which was both a protection and a danger. With the elaboration of the ritual for the central sanctuary and the regulation of personal practice there arose a recognition of prayer and worship that was more intellectual in its character. In all this there was weakness and failure, division, controversy, and no one at the time could tell what an important stream of thought and life was about to be contributed to the larger world and to permanent religious culture.

When, a generation later, the Persian period begins, by the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus, the actual work of dedicating an altar and rebuilding the temple became possible. We know how a few people, starting with high hopes and persevering through depressing circumstances, attempted to restore the

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ancient splendour and prestige of Jerusalem. The sermons of Haggai and Zechariah, the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah may show us in what spirit and through what struggles this was in some measure accomplished. Let us remember that this was possible because of the fierce determination and heroic sacrifices of many devoted men; and also possible because of their peculiar political position. The Jewish community was part of a great empire, an empire which allowed some measure of local government and religious freedom; its life was municipal rather than political, it had no foreign relations, consequently the whole energy of the people that was available after the actual support of life could be turned toward theology and religion. True, there was trouble with their immediate neighbours the Samaritans, and within there were citizens who did not wish to be completely disciplined and dragooned by zealots. Books so different in spirit as Jonah and Joel, which probably belong to this time, show varied points of view among men fitted to be leaders of the community. One thing is proved, namely, that the gradual process succeeded in producing a community resting upon well defined lines of thought, custom, and practice, a community more and more isolating itself and gaining a strongly individual character. This was in its way a discipline, "a culture," destined to stand out still more clearly in later generations.

But in 333 B.C. another stream of culture comes from the West, when Alexander the Great gains his great military victory and founds a new empire on

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the ruins of the Persian Government. In the following century, the Jews are attracted in large numbers towards Egypt, and under the Ptolemies, in the new city of Alexandria, formed a link between the Greek conquerors and the native population. Soon it became necessary to begin the work of Bible translation ; most men find it difficult to carry more than one language in good working order, and the Hebrew Bible had to be turned into Greek, for the use of the Alexandrian Jews. That translation has played a great part and it was familiar at a later time to many of the early Christians. To study a new language and come in contact with new modes of thought and life must have had an influence on even the strictest Jews, but the training of centuries had been thorough, and the student, even when attempting to recommend his religion to philosophical Greeks, still remained a real Jew. The outward forms of culture did not change his inmost life. At the same time these new fashions of thought and life began to spread in Palestine and in their more worldly aspects appealed to the young priests. Thus there arose a cleavage in the Jewish community between those who yielded to the fascination of the new culture, with its intellectualism and its love of the beautiful, and those who were thereby driven to a more devout study and stricter application of their own law.

Thus a religious community was created that had great cohesion, because of its attachment to the temple, its enthusiastic devotion to the law, its thankfulness and pride in its great history, and its intelligent appreciation of the noble teaching of the

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prophets. Such a community may be depended upon to resist the relaxing influence of modern luxuries and fashions, and to fight bravely for its life, if the stern necessity should arise. Such a crisis came early in the second century B.C., when Palestine passed from the control of the Ptolemies in Egypt to that of the Syrian Empire. They were at first pleased with the change and thought that it might be beneficial, but that illusion soon passed away. Antiochus Epiphanes, the King of Syria, from whom the trouble came, was a man with some brilliant gifts but with a tyrannical and unbalanced temper. As there was already division among the Jews caused by the new Greek influence and the spirit of faction, he probably thought it would be comparatively an easy task to bring the nation over to the kind of Greek religion that he patronised. He and his helpers quite underestimated the passionate devotion of the Jews to their religion and the heroic sacrifices that they were prepared to make. When the revolt broke out the Maccabeans provided warriors and statesmen equal to the need. Fighting against powerful odds, the Jews who had been so long without political power and military equipment discovered that "the saints" were not to be despised. In spite of diversions within and the strength of the enemy without they carried the war to a successful issue. After varying fortunes they gained the right to a free exercise of their religion. Then many of the strict religious party, who had no political ambitions, were disposed to cease fighting and attend to their own pursuits. This might have been possible if

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the Greek party had shown any wise statesmanship or kindly tolerance. As that was not the case, the revolt ran on to its logical conclusion and the Maccabean leaders, partly by bold action and partly by clever diplomacy, gained political independence.

For a time the Jewish Kingdom showed great military strength and political power. Success now, as in other cases, brought corruption, and a noble fight for religious liberty ended in tragic national failure. Though something like the power and extent of the early Davidic Kingdom had been reached, the end was near ; the Roman Empire was reaching out in all directions ; wonderful strength and wisdom would, in any case, have been needed to meet the new circumstances. The tyrannical rulers had been defeated ; the external foe had been conquered ; men had rallied to the defence of the temple, the protection of the sacred books and the support of the religious customs. But deep lines of cleavage within the nation itself continued to separate different classes ; the worldly priests, the political adventurers, and the zealous pedantic factions had each their own aims and interests. The political destruction of the nation was prepared for not only by external circumstances but by those deep internal divisions, by which the parties of later times, Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians, were formed. But, at the same time, the way was not only prepared for the prophetic ministry of the Christ, but also for the perpetuation of a Jewish religion that could survive the destruction of the temple and separation from the soil. The real patriots and

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leaders of the people gave their strength not so much to politics as to religion and theology ; the school became a rival to, and in some measure a substitute for, the temple. Religion attached itself to literature, the power of the book became immense ; men really worshipped the Law and ascribed a sacred position and power to the other ancient books. By that time the Book of Psalms had attained the form that it now possesses and preserved as a perpetual treasure for both Jew and Christian the songs and prayers of patriots and saints. It is, then, in the five hundred years of history that we have briefly outlined, under the Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Syrian rulers, and in the fiery furnace of persecution that drove them to fierce revolt (see the Book of Daniel), in this long varied period, that most of the Psalms were written and the Book took its final shape. It is a testimony that in this age of national decline and dreary disappointment, of fierce intolerant struggles and pedantic legalism, there was at the heart of the Jewish nation and religion a living piety, a growing spirituality, a fervent devotion, a sense of sin and sorrow—in other words a hunger of the soul that no mere ritual splendour of dogmatic external rule can satisfy.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN AND STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

THE Jews divided their "canon," or collection of sacred literature, into three parts—The Law, The Prophets, and The Writings; the first part contains the five "Books of Moses"; the second the prophets and earlier histories, while the third is a miscellaneous collection in which we find, along with the later histories, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles, etc., also the Wisdom Literature, that is the books of reflection, as Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, and the Psalter. It is probable that each of these divisions represents a distinct canon which attained its separate sacred position at a different stage. In this case the Psalter would be one of the latest books to attain its final form and reach that stage of rigidity which results from a state of absolute sacredness. It is not in our province, at present, to discuss the idea of "canonical" as it has maintained itself through many generations, and to ask how far or in what way it is affected by historical study or the critical point of view. Sufficient now simply to observe that the collection of poems that we call "the Psalter" shows signs of a growth—that is, processes in various stages and influenced by different points of view. Nearly all the great books of the Old Testament are

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compilations, and as we study them we learn that men's ideas of book-making in those days differed from those which prevail in our time. Sometimes in our own day, a man or a committee will undertake to make a new building out of certain individual bricks of literature, mingling old and new according to the needs of the day. The ancient Churchmen also did a certain amount of rearrangement and adaptation, but the time came when they felt that they must not deal too freely with the work of those who had gone before. Concerning this collection of poems we might find and tabulate an immense number of external facts, but in our brief review we are only concerned with those facts that throw light upon the ideas and methods of the compilers.

The word "psalm" comes to us from the Greek; the Hebrew noun of which it is a translation does not occur in these poems, only in the titles, but the verb is used in the body of the psalms (ix. 11, etc.), and means "to play upon the harp" and then "to sing with such musical accompaniment." The title which the Jews applied to the collection, "Book of *Hymns*," gives the plural of a word "praise" or "praise song" that is found in the Psalter (xl. 3; cxlvii. 1). Hence it was early regarded as a hymnbook, containing songs and liturgical exercises suitable for public worship. We have no direct information as to how the present hymnbook came into existence, though we can see that it is made up of smaller books, and that there have been various stages of arrangement and re-arrangement.

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Naturally the earliest literature of a vigorous people takes poetic form and in the Hebrew scriptures we have ancient specimens in the song of Deborah, and the collections which bore the names "The Book of the Righteous," "The Book of the Wars of Yahweh" (Judges v., Josh. x. 13; Num. xxi. 14). In the religious festivals music and singing played a considerable part, but were evidently of a kind that did not make for edification in the highest sense (Amos v. 23). We are told that the exiles were requested to sing "Songs of Zion" (Ps. cxxxvii.); whether this means more than that joyfulness and song were associated with their worship at home, or that there was already a small collection of written songs we cannot decide. In the third century B.C. the Chronicler represents the view that David was the founder of temple-music but not that he was a writer of psalms. A century later the son of Sirach (Ecclus. xlvi. 8, 9). tells us that "He set singers also before the altar, and their voices make sweet melodies." This view grew until the great king was regarded as the author of a large number of psalms and his name was attached to the whole collection.

We are not certain that the ascription to David, in its earliest use, meant authorship in the strictest sense; it may have expressed the belief that he collected psalms and arranged a book for the use of the temple and singers. The final view that the Psalter, as a whole, sprang from David points to a great contrast between the ancient and the modern way of thinking. We lay stress on *process*; we delight in the study of "origins"; we treat history

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biologically and we delight in tracing events back to causes that have long been at work. It was just the other way with the ancients, they took events that had taken generations to accomplish and linked them with the name of one man or one generation. So we have the Law of Moses, the Wisdom of Solomon, the Psalter of David, the Greek translation of the Seventy Scholars. They ignored the long growth, the silent process ; we may, on the other hand, tend to forget the power and influence of great personalities. In passing we might note that the kind of literary activity represented by the Psalms did not cease when once this collection was closed and canonised. There is a "Psalter of Solomon" which contains eighteen poems, and exists now only in the Greek translation ; these in the main represent the tone and temper of the Pharisaic circle in the first century B.C. Similar poems also are found in some of the "apocryphal" books.

The present Psalter is divided into five books—iii.-xli. ; xlii.-lxxii. ; lxxiii.-lxxxix. ; xc.-cvi. ; cvii.-cl.—with a doxology at the end of each book. Ps. cl. serves as a doxology to the last book and makes a fitting close to the whole collection ; it has no particular literary merit but closes appropriately on the note of praise. This division looks like a mechanical imitation of the five books of the Law, and has no special value from the point of view either of tradition or critical judgment. But it is evident that earlier books or collections have been put together. The rights of earlier collectors had to be respected by later compilers. This is clearly shown by the fact of

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duplication liii.=xiv. ; lxx.=xl. 13ff. ; lxxi. 1-3= xxxi. 1-3 ; lvii. 7-11=cviii. 1-5 ; lx. 6-12=cviii. 7-13. This kind of thing would not occur in a hymn-book compiled from original individual elements by those who felt that they had a perfectly free hand. In Book I., the name Yahweh predominates, while in II. it is the name Elohim (God) that appears in most cases. Compare, for example, xiv. with liii., where practically the only difference in the two poems is in the use of the divine name. Thus we see that the earlier editors had their own theological conceptions and preferences of this kind. It is not possible to trace the Psalter to its original elements in the earliest small collections, but it is clear that hymn-books bearing such names as David, Asaph, etc., were in existence for some time before they were united. The so-called Pilgrim Psalms cxx.-cxxxiv. probably formed a separate book, which had as its title the phrase which now appears as the superscription of the separate psalms. When the various elements of the whole Psalter were brought together a number of other poems were included ; these had maintained a separate existence without titles or traditional associations. This kind of enquiry and analysis can be carried into great detail and, while in many points no certainty can be reached, we are left with the impression that the scholars of that day showed great interest and diligence in handling the precious material.

The superscriptions, titles, and musical directions have been the subject of much investigation that is apt to be both dreary in its nature and uncertain in

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its results. The original meaning of many of these terms is lost beyond all hope of restoration ; fortunately they have little relation to the historical setting or spiritual interpretation of the particular poems. In the superscriptions, however, we do find attempts at historical interpretations and critical study, even if much of it seems to us now to be childish and arbitrary. Some of our modern criticism is certainly arbitrary and fantastic enough. Let us take one example of the ancient kind. Ps. xxxiv. has this superscription " Of David : when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech, etc." " The title has a reference to the life of David when he changed or disguised his judgment, feigned madness before Abimelech and he sent him away and he departed, in accordance with the story of 1 Sam. xxi. 11ff., except that the Philistine King is there called Achish. This change might have arisen from defective memory of the editor, or from substituting the common name of the Philistine King for the specific one. Ps. lvi. is also referred in its title to the same period of David's life at Gath. The editor did not mean to imply that David composed these psalms on that occasion, but that they might be supposed to represent his spiritual emotions at that time." (Briggs). This is the view of a recent critic on the note of an ancient Jewish edition. This psalm is now generally admitted to belong to a period long after the time of David ; it is an alphabetic poem, having affinities in style and subject with the Wisdom Literature of the post-exilic period. A very careful conservative scholar says, " But it must be

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acknowledged that thought and style are those of the Book of Proverbs, and apparently of a later age. Was the psalm written by some poet-sage, who thought of that perilous episode in David's life as one of the most striking illustrations of the truth which he wished to enforce?" (Kirkpatrick). This gives a slightly different view of the meaning of the introductory note.

All this is very temperate and reverent. Perhaps a little sharper criticism may make us see more clearly the point at issue. Consider then this statement regarding such superscriptions in general. "If the Psalm speaks of the *dry* land, then it has been composed in the wilderness of Judah, Ps. lxiii. 1; if the supposed David speaks of the confinement in which he is held fast, then of course the psalm was composed in the cave, Ps. cxlii. 7, etc. The uneducated are distinguished from the scientifically schooled men in the recklessness with which they draw important conclusions from slight observations; in Ps. xxxiv. the word *tām* (judgment or understanding) occurs; it at once occurs to a sharp-minded reader that David once changed his *tām*, and the conclusion is drawn that David composed this alphabetic didactic psalm, when he had to pretend to be mad in order to escape destruction, and further King Achish is confounded with King Abimelech, with whom Abraham had an unpleasant encounter. We need only compare the superscriptions of Pss. iii., vii., li., etc. with the contents and character of the poems, in order to be convinced that it is impossible to speak of a tradition, that what we have everywhere is wild combination "

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(Duhm). Well, as we have said, the ancients have no monopoly of wildness, and it is interesting to note that behind such conjectures there is the true feeling that literature of the most spiritual kind has its root in human experience and its close contact with actual life. This Hebrew word *ta'am*, which means *to taste*, and also *behaviour, disposition* (in Ps. cxix. 66, good *judgment*) is used in the psalm in the intellectual sense, and it led the reader to think of another passage, 1 Sam. xxi. 11, where the word was used in connection with an interesting incident in David's life. The same word "taste," v. 8, probably led to the use of this poem in the ancient Christian Church as an eucharistic Psalm. When we realise that the study of literature makes us desire to find, as far as possible, the historical framework of each piece, and that nowhere in the Old Testament is this more difficult than in the Psalms, we are likely to be more sympathetic towards those early efforts which may now seem so futile. In every realm of science men had to make many "wild combinations" before they found the fruitful method.

Science and invention are not the blessings that we owe to the Hebrews; originality and elaboration in literary or other forms are not their special gift. We know now that the *parallelism* which is the distinguishing feature of Hebrew verse existed before their time, and that they never developed a full and perfect "metre" in our sense of that word. There was music in the line, the rhythm of regular beats or accents; and the knowledge of this, especially when assisted by other considerations, may enable

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us to correct a text that has suffered through the ravages of time. Appreciation of beauty in sight and sound they no doubt possessed, but no conscious developed theory of artistic perfection. Something we must say about art, but our main concern is with the thoughts concerning God, the world and man, that are here presented with the stern facts of sin and suffering, the plaintive cries for help and the victorious confidence in truth and righteousness. A book has been produced which is not altogether a prayer-book or a hymn-book, but that is larger than either while it has something of the strength of both. The singing of psalms did not play the part in the Jewish temple that it has done in many Christian communities. The book in its final form was more a handbook for students and the common people than for priests. When we note the influence that it has left on the New Testament, we can see how deeply it had entered into the life of the laymen and families of Israel. Its power since then has been immense and widespread. "What a record that would be, if one could write it down, all the spiritual experiences, the disclosures of the heart, the comforts and the conflicts which men in the course of ages have connected with the words of the Psalms. What a history if we could discover the place this book has occupied in the inner life of the heroes of the Kingdom of God." (Tholuck, quoted by Dr. J. Ker). Helpful books have been written along that line; our purpose is different—it is to try to get behind the later interpretations and associations that have gathered round the well known words, and find in what way the outlook of the writers

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differs from ours, and how they also modified earlier views and adapted them to their present needs. Time and the growth of Christian sentiment have hidden or even beautified some unpleasant features ; but when we get back, where it is possible, to the original type of thought and feeling, we shall find genuine human passion of which we have no need to be ashamed.

NOTE FOR CHAPTER II.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to mention only facts that can be clearly seen by an examination of the Book, and to indicate wherever possible the " ideas " that lie behind them ; in this note we cannot enter fully into a question that is so intricate and uncertain, but can merely show by an example that the nature of the subject is such as not to allow of elaborate treatment in a series of popular expositions. Men who are quite competent Hebrew scholars have differed widely on this subject ; one finds in the Psalter poems belonging to all the periods of the history from the Early Monarchy to the Maccabean (Briggs), another finds that no psalm is of pre-exilic date except possibly Ps. xviii. (Cheyne), yet another tells us that it is possible but not proved that some of the earliest Psalms belonging to the Persian period (Duhm). It is evident that different collections have been put together, and that this compilation extended over a considerable period, but it is when we go beyond this and try to show exactly how and when this process was carried out that we meet with difficulty. Dr. Briggs gives a complete table of the " major " and " minor " Psalters, the two majors being " the Elohist " xlii.-lxxxiii. " originally in a major Psalter, edited probably in Babylonia in the middle Greek period, and made up chiefly of selections from the previous Minor Psalters " ; and (2) the Directors, *i.e.*, those which bear the title *to the chief Musician*, collected in Palestine in the middle Greek period and

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made up of "minor" Psalters. Let us turn then to one of these "minor" Psalters. "'Miktam' in the title of seven Psalms indicates that they were taken from an early collection of choice pieces, made in the middle Persian period" (Briggs). "But the fact that the 'Michtam' Psalms have few features in common points to an interpretation which applies to the music rather than the subject matter" (Davison). "It is probably like *Maschil* a musical term, the meaning of which cannot now be determined" (Kirkpatrick). "We do not know whether *Michtam* (Ps. xvi., lvi.-lx.) signifies a particular kind of song or has a quite different signification" (Duhm). It is clear then that at first small collections of these sacred poems were made and that later they were brought together and subjected to re-arrangement, but the complete analysis of all the steps and dates is now impossible. Fortunately we can gain intellectual stimulus and spiritual profit from the Psalms without such final knowledge.

CHAPTER III

SECONDARY LITERATURE

THERE is little satisfaction in attempting a systematic classification of the contents of the Psalter ; that has been done many times, and while, in each case, it may be interesting and helpful, it is, by the nature of the case, never complete. Many books are capable of being analysed correctly and the plan of the author or compiler clearly discerned, but not a book of this kind, that has grown from smaller collections and that consists of separate pieces that are similar even when most different. In one and the same poem prayer, praise, and reflection may be mingled. " The Penitential Psalms " are not all penitential in the same sense, and not more so than others not included in this special group. " The Pilgrim Psalms " differ in subject and tone. The alphabetical psalms have merely a point of formal resemblance. Some can no doubt be distinguished as having a liturgical character and others as serving the purpose of private meditation. Certain royal, historical and nature psalms are fairly distinct in character, but these also have the element of adoration, praise, or prayer which is more fully expressed in other poems. Referring then to more systematic treatises, we turn to consider the general nature of this literature.

Secondary Literature

When we say that it is secondary, we mean merely that it rests upon the strata of historical and prophetic literature of an earlier time. It has been said that in prophecy God speaks to man, while in the Psalms man speaks to God. There is a certain broad truth in such antithetic statements, but they cannot be taken without qualification. In the prophetic message man speaks to men, an inspired man of clear vision seeks to raise his fellow men to the higher levels of spiritual life. In the psalms God is speaking to us through the deep experiences and keen desires of men whose nature has been stirred to its depths. It is still true, however, that in these poems the stories, messages, and laws that have come from God return heavenward through meditation, prayer, and praise. The prophets and historians appeal to men in the name of humanity. The spirit of the psalmists is fresh and living, quickened by the sense of need or the burden of suffering, but the form is conditioned by the country and church in which the writers live and by their present personal experience. True, these pieces are short ; the actual background has fallen away from them ; time has softened some of the sharpest features ; wherever possible Christian sentiment has gathered round them, so that they seem to be universal, independent of time and place. In this we can rejoice, but we do not forget that the source of their power is the fact that they are so intensely human, that the cry of confidence or complaint comes not from cloistered man, but from those who were bearing the friction, disappointment and irritation of actual conflict with harsh circumstances

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and unreasonable men. The supreme appeal is to the throne of the living God, but they find arguments and supports in the wonders of nature, the history of their fathers and the teaching of their prophets.

It is not possible in the great things of life to get back to the absolute beginnings, and while originality means the possession of creative power, it does not mean making something out of nothing. The men of greatest genius are often the greatest borrowers, in the sense that they can absorb most fully the varied features of their own age and build them up into a new world with larger significance and power. The Old Testament is a literature that extends over a thousand years and hence it has many repetitions, the same facts of nature and life are treated from different points of view, but the repetitions are not mechanical, they show the working of a free living spirit. The view of the world and God implied in the Psalter is that which had been worked out in previous centuries, handed down by tradition and enlarged by the influence of prophetic teaching. These points need a fuller treatment but may be considered here in connection with the general character of the whole. A careful study of the important nature psalms viii. and civ. suggests that the authors were well acquainted with the creation narratives in the book of Genesis. These poems are not based in any mechanical way upon the earlier stories, but the order and style of both accounts had deeply impressed the poet who, while faithful to the teaching of the sacred book, could reproduce it in a spirit of devotion. We know that the two statements

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in Gen. i. and ii. are of different date and origin, and that they preserve features that belong to an even earlier time. While they are truly Hebrew in their belief in one God, ideas of a primitive kind concerning the origin of the world and the life of our remote ancestors still clung to them. But these stories have a certain originality in that the living spirit of the Hebrew religion has given life and unity to the scattered materials. In the Psalms it is different, the only new element is the song of praise and the application to prayer. "The heavens" now in the song of worship "declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork." But it is the well known God of the prophets, and the "firmament" created by Him long ago. In other words those students and worshippers have taught us how to use the ancient documents in a spirit that keeps them fresh and living. There is no hardness or dogmatic pedantry in their manner of handling the book as a source of praise and inspiration of worship.

It is the same in the sphere of history; it is the "God of our fathers known of old," revealed in His redemptive acts towards the nation but also the living God of the present. In history we have first the wonderful fact, the redemption from Egyptian bondage or Babylonian exile, and then the first poetic presentation of such fact in song and story. The impression is that of wonder that God should do such great things for His people, and the fact is pictured, not in the cold language of science, but in the living figures of poetry, which seek to do justice to the

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enthusiasm of faith and gratitude. Then there comes later reflection and larger interpretation working on the same facts. Men see in them a principle, and through them they endeavour to find what we in our more pretentious language call "a philosophy of history." The world grows larger, there is an increasing sense of continuity and progress, the fact that before was treated as a local matter is seen to have a world-wide significance. Thus we can trace with interest and delight the same fact pictured in early stories, referred to by prophetic interpreters, and included in a later and larger scheme of history. But when it is in danger of becoming tradition or dogma, we need the poet to seize it afresh and contribute not new theology but a new song, which makes the old teaching applicable to worship. Hence we can sing this song because its real theme is the presence of God, the God of Jacob and at the same time Lord of the earth, who must still be the centre of worship and source of strength.

When Israel went forth out of Egypt,
The house of Jacob from a people of unintelligible speech,
The sea saw and fled ;
Jordan turned backward ;
 The mountains skipped like rams ;
 The hills (danced) like lambs of the flock.
What ailed thee, O Sea, that thou shouldst flee ?
O Jordan, that thou shouldst turn backward ?
Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams ;
Ye hills, that ye (danced) like lambs of the flock ?
It was at the presence of the Lord of the earth ;
At the presence of the God of Jacob.

(Ps. cxiv., Briggs' Version).

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It does not need lengthy arguments or numerous quotations to show that the Psalter is touched by the prophetic spirit, and that the great original prophets have done their work before it came into being. Those men, Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, were real leaders ; they were pioneers of what we call social morality and purifiers of worship. In the early days public worship was of a festal, joyful character. Men felt, in their own way, that the joy of the Lord was their strength, the things that gave strength and satisfaction to body and mind were His gifts. But the worship was often coarse and riotous, with accompaniments that were sensual as well as sensuous. Such worship was denounced by the prophets as unworthy of the Most High God. The noisy revelry and vain show were judged from the religious point of view and found wanting. That view was finally accepted by the whole nation ; they came to believe that the fierce judgments of God upon their nation were on account of sin, and that one special sin was this unruly, licentious worship, " on every high hill and under every luxuriant tree." When the nation was chastened and subdued there was one " holy hill " where men could approach their God in sober reverence with due moral preparation. The prophet had called men to wash themselves, to make themselves clean, to put away their evil doings from Yahweh's presence, and to remember that right conduct was more important than splendid ritual (Isa. i.). When the Psalmist in a different age faces the same problem he asks

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*Yahweh, who shall be a guest in Thy tent ?
Who shall dwell on Thy holy mount ?*

and he gives an answer that is in harmony with prophetic teaching ; worship is not now denounced, an effort is made to bring it into harmony with the highest life :

He that walketh perfect in his righteousness ;
He that speaketh truth in his mind ;
 Who hath not played the spy upon his neighbour,
 Hath not done harm to his friend,
 Hath not taken up a reproach against the one near to him.
Despised in his eyes is the reprobate ;
But them that fear Yahweh he honoureth.
He doth swear to (his friend) and changeth not,
His silver he hath not given in usury,
 Nor taken a bribe against the innocent.
 Whoso doeth these things shall not be moved.

Ps. XV. (Briggs' Version.)

It is clear also that the Psalmists are inspired by a great hope for the future. If the belief in personal immortality does not find frequent or clear expression the national hope shines out with unabated brightness. Not like "the Preacher," who found only vanity and could not cling to either of these hopes, are these men of faith. For them the glories of the past and the splendours of the future are a sure refuge from the barrenness and distress of the present. That must be so if the God of Israel is also the God of the whole earth. He may come in judgment, but He will give peace to His people. The basis of this hope is the fact that the God whom they worship rules the wide world.

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Make a joyful noise unto Yahweh, all ye lands,
Serve Yahweh with gladness ;
Come before His presence with singing,
Know ye that Yahweh He is God :
It is He that hath made us, and His we are.
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

This doctrine, which to us now is familiar and commonplace, is the result of centuries of toil and divine guidance. There was a time when Israel and Yahweh corresponded to each other as people and patron, and the outside world was not included in the area of Hebrew theology. Prophets declared one moral law proceeding from Yahweh's throne, and thoughtful men came to recognise the universality of His reign, laying stress upon Israel's peculiar position. Now this teaching can be expressed as here in joyful song and noble exhortation.

On this large background the faith in an ideal king as Yahweh's representative on earth finds a fitting expression. The Israelite did not deify or worship the king ; he did not ascribe to him the divine right to govern wrong. They regarded him as chosen by God to be a servant, " a good shepherd " to His people. They prayed that the king might have strength and victory (xx., xxi.). But quite as strongly did they pray that he might reign in righteousness.

Give the king Thy justice, O God,
And Thy righteousness to the king's son,
He shall judge Thy people with righteousness.

It is probable that the original form of this psalm (lxxii.) has been enlarged, so that in the worship of

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the people it might express not only prayer for a present ruler, but the hope in an ideal King who should rule "from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." Not of any earthly king but only of the Messiah can it be said that "All kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him." But with all His success and splendour His chief care will be to have pity on the poor and to deliver the needy. He shall meet the need which has been so distressingly felt in Oriental lands for good government and wise guidance.

All men shall be blessed in him ;
All nations shall call him happy.

CHAPTER IV

HEBREW POETRY AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

IN our own times much skill and energy have been spent in making clear to the ordinary reader the fact that the Old Testament is not a mere collection of histories, laws, and dogmas, but a large and varied "literature," and in illustrating the thought that this literature is not simply a "record" of facts and opinions or a "revelation" of eternal truths, but also a reflection of human life in various stages of progress and in conflict with the different problems of life. Certainly the power of this literature made itself felt in all ages to thoughtful students and simple devout readers, even before the historical perspective was enlarged, and when the book was to some extent cramped by being compressed into the framework of a later scholastic theology. But with the new study of the "humanities" in modern times there came a higher criticism and appreciation of literature in general, and a clearer conception of the strength and simplicity of this great Book. Men whose names stand highest in the realm of criticism and poetry have expressed and illustrated this thought, not in any spirit of patronage but with reverent appreciation and a sense of communion with the great souls of that distant past. At the same time much labour

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has been given to the study of the forms of Hebrew poetry and the questions of rhyme, rhythm, metre, verse and strophe. Much of this toil, so divergent in its results, may seem to be wild and fruitless ; but to those engaged in it, it has a charm of its own and brings at least a closer acquaintance with the sacred text. This is the work of special students, and the result of their painful labours may be seen in many commentaries and monographs.

It is not our present purpose to enter into technical discussions of this kind, as to the nature of poetry in general or of Hebrew poems in particular. The Hebrews shared our common nature, and life among them had the same features as among other primitive and simple people. They delighted in the simple melody and the festive dance ; rhythm, repetition, suggestive sounds made a successful appeal and received a ready response. They no doubt knew and used the earliest form of wind and stringed instruments ; music and song were the solace of the lonely shepherd as well as the joy of the festive crowd ; in their own way they ministered to ease and pleasure as well as served the purposes of prophecy and patriotism. But while in modern days Jews have stood in the front rank in philosophy, poetry and music, the particular contribution of Hebrew life and of later Judaism in the pre-Christian era was not in these spheres. What Israel, by the grace of God, has given to the world is a sober, lofty monotheism, a spiritual view of religion and sacrifice, and a direct application of religious morality to social life. These great gifts are given to us in simple

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poetic forms; these forms the Israelites did not invent, and they did not develop them to the elaborate metres attained by other members of the Semitic family. The miracle of this small people whose poetry has been made to speak in all languages and has found its way into all lands, belongs not to science, art, or philosophy, but to the realm of religious thought. Its rejection of idolatry, polytheism, and mythology, prepared the way for a more scientific view of the world, though our literalism in the treatment of its narratives and poems may have provoked the later conflicts between science and the Bible which are now happily out of date. Our reason then for regarding the Psalter as in the main a late book is not in any advance of metre or poetical technique, but in its theology and its relation to the earlier literature. Poetry is naturally one of the earliest forms of a nation's literature, and is found in all periods of its history. But if we survey a thousand years of English literature we find great changes from the simple alliterative rhythm of early poetry to the complex metres and rich harmonies of more cultured times. If, however, we compare Ps. cxxxix. with other Hebrew poems belonging to a much earlier period, the change and advance is not in either metrical complexity or poetic vigour, but in the character of the thought regarding God and man.

Poetry is the natural language of religion, not simply because, when it is real, it expresses feeling, for there is no such thing here as mere feeling, but because it presents the great ideas of religion and

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patriotism in concrete, living forms that are penetrated with the most intense passion. It is well for us to remember that the preachers of those simpler days were not content with slovenly utterances, but poured their message into artistic moulds that made them effective to their own audience and helped them to a more enduring life. They were Orientals and their images and illustrations must be explained from the scenery and usages of their own land, but they were not oriental in the sense in which we often use that term now; they were not pantheists or theosophists. There is a clearness and directness in their speech; there may be difficulties in the text, but there is no mistiness in the thought. They are close to the earth and in their most poetic raptures have a strong vein of common sense. They do not leave the hard realities of life to dwell in some mystic cloud-land; the two poles of their thought are the common earth, and the throne of God.

How much of what we could call "secular" poetry has been lost we cannot tell; even with us the division between "sacred" and "secular" is difficult to make, and it is probable that the ancients did not make it at all, as every sphere of life was saturated with religious influence and had its own ceremonies in which songs played a part. The opening of wells, the gathering of the harvest, the special incidents of domestic life, as well as the tragic acts of war, were all fit themes for a truly religious poetry. The song of Deborah is believed to be one of the earliest poems we possess, and for descriptive power and dramatic interest there is

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nothing finer. "Here every phase of the glorious battle for freedom, the ebb and flow in the surging tide of victory, the brilliant deeds of heroism displayed 'on the heights of the field' and the undying shame of those who refused to come 'to the help of Jahweh among the heroes' are all painted in living throbbing, heart-stirring words. The closing scene, too, with its vivid portraiture of character, and its sharp contrasts of fear, dismay, and hope is one of real dramatic power, tragical in its suggestion of impending evil, suddenly broken off by ominous silence."¹ This is true, but there is no advanced theological or ecclesiastical theory; it is a battle-song pure and simple, a cry that those of the same language, blood, and faith should come to the help of Yahweh against mighty warriors and oppressors. Patriotism and religion mingle, but there is no suggestion of the rich theology which gives significance to later poems. There is no eschatology; the whole energy is absorbed in the actual present conflict. There are interesting historical features. Judah is not there; the unity of the tribes is only partial and feeble; praise is given to a Kenite woman; and it closes with a passionate cry that often found an echo in later history, "So let all Thine enemies perish, O Yahweh, But let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." In that one cry, however, is the promise of all else; the name Yahweh appears in history as that of a God who unites His followers in an endeavour after national power and true social fellowship.

¹ Dr. A. R. Gordon, "The Poets of the Old Testament," 31f.

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That was the beginning of the later religious movements, the central thought from which all else springs.

In 2 Samuel i., we have another noble poem, a lament by David over the fall of Saul and Jonathan. There is no conclusive reason for doubting that David was a poet and that this pathetic tribute comes from his hand.

Saul and Jonathan, the beloved and the lovely,
In life and death they were not divided ;
They were swifter than eagles,
They were stronger than lions.
I am distressed for thee, Jonathan, my brother,
Thou wert pleasant to me, exceeding wonderful,
Thy love to me was beyond the love of women.
How are the mighty fallen,
And the weapons of war perished !

But here again what we have is a war-song, though of a different tone ; instead of triumphant exultation in victory, there is the wail of distress over the loss of valiant, unfortunate warriors. One striking thing here also is the utter absence of any tinge of the later theological thought. David the chivalrous, magnanimous chieftain is evidently not yet a Churchman of the Jewish type. To gather the greatness of Psalm literature round his name was only natural in the sense that to the ancients, with their lack of specific knowledge, it was natural to associate any great movement with some great name, as the " Law of Moses " and " the Wisdom of Solomon."

In Ex. xv. we have a poem which refers to an earlier time than either of the foregoing, as it celebrates the great deliverance of the Exodus, but unlike

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them, it is not contemporaneous. Here there is considerable descriptive and poetic power, and the theme is Yahweh the God of battles delivering His people in the critical hour, but there is a trace of the later theological tone, "Who is like Thee, O Yahweh, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" There is also something of the spirit in which the Deuteronomic preacher looks back and reviews the history of his people.

In Thy mercy Thou hast led the people which Thou hast redeemed :

Thou hast guided them in Thy strength to Thy holy habitation.
The peoples have heard, they tremble.

Pangs have taken hold of the inhabitants of Philistia.

Then were the chieftains of Edom amazed ;

The mighty men of Moab—trembling has taken hold upon them :

All the inhabitants of Canaan are melted away.

Terror and trembling falleth upon them ;

By the greatness of Thine arm they are as still as a stone ;

Till Thy people pass over, O Yahweh.

Until the people that Thou hast gotten pass over.

Thou dost bring them and plant them in the mount of Thine inheritance.

The place Thou didst make for Thy dwelling, O Yahweh,

The sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established.

Yahweh shall reign for ever and ever.

Here we have a poem that is not unlike some of the historical psalms ; it is in its origin probably separated by many centuries from the primitive poetry previously referred to, and belongs to a time much nearer to that of the earliest psalms.

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When we reach the prophetic period, these poetic forms are brought into the service of preaching. The great prophets were men of poetic gifts but their contribution was not to the form of poetry ; they used the moulds that had come down from ancient times, and into these they poured a type of thought relatively, if not absolutely, new. Their speech was of actual political and social problems and of judgment that must come upon the nation because of unfaithfulness to God and duty. The lament or dirge is sung over the apostasy and punishment of Israel and Judah (Amos v. 2 ; Micah ii. 4). Two of the most effective poems of this kind are "The Song of the City"—its former loyalty, its present corruption and future purification (Isa. i. 21-26), and the "Song of the Vineyard" (Isa. v. 1-7, cf. Ps. lxxx.), which gives a striking picture of the nation's responsibility and ingratitude. In some cases these great sermons have suffered in transmission from age to age, but there is sufficient evidence that in the period of this great preaching, poetic vigour was joined with spiritual vision and moral power. The men who were facing actual specific problems, and who were addressing their countrymen face to face, strove to put their message in a form that would make an instant and mighty appeal. It is however, largely a message of criticism and denunciation ; not by any soft words or shallow philosophy could the demand be made that religion should be regarded as a service to one's fellow-men in sober, honest ways. For a century and a half the stream of poetic prophecy poured itself against the ritual

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splendour and political corruption. These great men were not concerned with "the songs of Zion," they were not creating hymns for use in the sanctuary; they were destroying the Church of the day, rejecting it as unfit to represent the true idea of religion. Their activity produced a great poetic literature expressing God's displeasure at the arrogance of men, His hatred of their greed and cruelty, His distaste for the popular worship and refusal to be bribed by it. Here is noble teaching which we to-day regard as elementary, commonplace, or even self-evident, and yet the fact is that it was at the time a great revelation, and the true understanding and application of it is the supreme need of our time.

Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and
his chambers by injustice;

That useth his neighbour's service without wages and giveth
him not his hire;

That saith, I will build me a vast palace with spacious chambers,
With deep cut windows, ceiled with cedar and painted with
vermilion.

Shalt thou reign because thou excellest in cedar?

Did not thy father eat and drink and execute law and justice?

He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well.

Was not this to know Me, saith Yahweh?

(Jer. xxii. 13-16.)

This is the note that rings all through the poetry of the prophetic period, the demand for pure worship and social justice. It was not until the nation was broken, its temple destroyed, its best people scattered, that the cry, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people," could be raised. While primitive religious customs

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continue to exist in Palestine and elsewhere, the Jewish religion sets them aside, seeks with fierce energy to cast out all recognisable "heathenism," and prepare for Yahweh a pure worship and devout people. Thenceforward, the poetry of Israel must take upon itself a relatively new task, that of expressing in the form of prayer and praise the priceless teaching of earlier ages and making it centre round the new sanctuary of Zion. When in this period the greatest poet arises, the author of the book of Job, it is to attack with volcanic passion the dogma of retribution, a dogma which was an attempt to preserve and put into systematic form the teaching of the prophets. That is the final magnificent outburst of creative genius and critical energy. But on the whole, in this later period, poetry was to be the servant of the sanctuary and its main declaration. "Praise waiteth for thee, O Yahweh, in Zion, and unto Thee shall the vow be performed." There is still, however, room for much personal passion and pathetic eloquence.

CHAPTER V

SCHOLARSHIP ANCIENT AND MODERN

IN this practical age we are inclined to speak slightly of the claims of scholarship, and to class pedants and bookworms among the nuisances and hinderers of efficiency. This is, of course, a superficial view, as there could have been no civilisation in any large sense without books, which enable the attainments of one generation to serve as the foundation and the starting point for the next. Our so-called "practical science" did not arise among savages unfettered by libraries and scholarship ; it originated among peoples who had inherited great religious and literary traditions. The sober monotheism which grew up in Israel helped to prepare the way for real science by disestablishing the many gods among whom the varied forms of nature and activities of human life were divided, and setting forth *One* source of life and power. There were no doubt annals, collections of laws, and books of poems in Israel in earlier days, but it is after the Exile that scholarship becomes a profession, and that the scribe, a layman who is neither prophet nor priest, becomes a power in the land. The power of the book grew ; the great subject of the schools was religion, " the Law," as a revelation

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of God, and the guide of a man's life. The Jews ever since have managed to combine in a clever manner the power of doing this world's business skilfully and successfully with reverence for the scribe and love of literature. This professional scholarship was at work on the whole of the Old Testament, but we are specially concerned with the Psalter. Even the handing down of these one hundred and fifty poems in the Hebrew and Greek languages demanded considerable energy and devotion. Book-making is quite different now when printed matter, according to copy, can be reeled off at the rate of thousands of yards a minute. The production and preservation of a small book was a more serious matter two thousand years ago. The smaller collections may have been made at different centres and acquired a certain authority which exerted an influence on the structure of the final volume. When once the present compilation was made, it had to be handed down and circulated by the slow, painful process of copying by hand.

There are two things to be borne in mind here ; first, that it is not possible by such a process to attain perfect accuracy and avoid variations, the wear and tear of the manuscript had to be made good by conjecture or by comparison with other copies ; second, that we are not quite sure when the time came of absolute canonisation, which turned the scribe into a mere copyist, we know that for some generations the documents were handled both reverently and freely by these ancient scholars. They wrote explanatory notes or alternative translations in the

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margin, which were afterwards, in many cases, copied into the text, and they added brief notes of their own to elucidate the statement and strengthen the appeal of the text. But there came a time when all freedom vanished; "the sacred text" must be preserved in the form then reached. For centuries an effort has been made with a fair amount of success to hand down absolutely the same text. Now the situation is that scholars of modern times try to investigate the nature and extent of the work done by their brethren more than two thousand years ago. Naturally, in such a sphere there is much uncertain speculation that must be left to the specialist, and which, while it may be a help to the expositor, is not absolutely essential to an appreciation of the power and beauty of these songs. If the principles of Hebrew metre were exhaustively settled and we knew that the Orientals were as much in love with regularity and symmetry as we are ourselves, conclusions drawn in this field would possess more certainty. In any case, we owe a debt of gratitude to those who devote themselves to the history of this branch of literature and seek to restore a particular poem as it is supposed to have left the hand of its author. Some things, however, must remain uncertain; it is not likely that the problem of ii. 12, "Kiss the son," etc., will ever be solved; it seems certain that the word there cannot mean "son," we must accept "worship sincerely" or "bow before him with trembling" and be thankful that the damage is not worse. viii. 1b cannot be translated as it stands in the original; we must omit a word and translate

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“ O set Thy splendour above the heavens ” or accept a very ingenious suggestion,¹ which vocalises the consonants differently and yields the sense “ let me sing Thy glory in the heavens with the mouth of a little child, etc.” (See p. 150). In xxxii. 6, “ in a time of finding ” is a phrase that is very difficult to explain, and it seems highly probable that the couplet should read :

For this let the pious pray to Thee in a time of distress ;
At the outburst of many waters, they shall not reach unto
him.

In lxxxix. 19, “ I have set a *crown* upon a hero ” seems more intelligible and better suited to the context than “ I have laid *help* upon one that is mighty,” and the similarity between the two original words is so great that the change could easily take place. In xviii. 13, the last line, “ Hailstones and coals of fire,” is a repetition of 12 b, is not found in the corresponding place 2 Sam. xxii. 14, and gives three lines in the verse instead of two, hence it is a repetition by a scribe. In lvi. 8, the question “ Are they not in Thy book ? ” is an extra line, and seems to be a prosaic gloss, after the striking phrase, “ Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle.” These illustrations, taken somewhat at random, are only specimens of textual problems that arise on every page, and they remind us of the fact that it was by painful toil that these poems were copied and handed down ; loving care was lavished upon their preservation, and yet in the long, slow process they could not escape the

¹ Duhm.

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carelessness and caprice which are inseparable from human toil of brain and hand.

Ps. lvi. is the complaint and prayer of a man who is involved in strife and surrounded by foes. The general sense is plain, though the text is in poor condition. Verses 11 and 12 are a repetition of *v.* 4 ; is this a refrain or an accidental repetition ? There are three ways of treating this question, (1) leaving them as they stand: (2) suggesting that, as a refrain is not to be thought of here, and as they sound better after *v.* 10, in *v.* 4 they are a repetition: and then (3) from the hands of a courageous scholar who is not afraid to apply his own metrical theory it appears in the following form:—here we have attained to symmetry of structure, whether it is that of the original author or of the modern scholar is another matter.

Be gracious unto me, for man doth tread me down ;
All day long the fighter presseth me ;
All day long my watchful foes do tread me down ;
For many are fighting against me.
O Most High, in the day I fear,
Unto Thee I trust,
 Of Yahweh I boast with a word of song.
 In Yahweh do I put my trust without fear.
 What can flesh do unto me ?
All day long with words they vex me.
Against me are all their plans.
For evil they gather themselves together ; they lurk ;
They watch my footprints,
Even as they wait for my life,
Because of trouble weigh out to them.
 Of Yahweh I boast with a word of song.

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In Yahweh do I put my trust without fear.
What can flesh do unto me ?
(I make known, I recount them, Yahweh ;)
My tears are put (before Thee).
Mine enemies will turn backward.
In the day I call I know it.
For Yahweh is for me,
Of Yahweh I boast with a word of song.
Of Yahweh I boast with a word of song.
In Yahweh do I put my trust without fear.
What can flesh do unto me ?
Upon me is (the obligation of) Thy votive offerings,
I will pay Thee thank-offerings ;
For Thou hast delivered my life from death,
And my feet from being pushed down,
That I may walk before Yahweh
In the light (of the land) of the living.
Of Yahweh I boast with a word of song.
In Yahweh do I put my trust without fear.
What can flesh do unto me ?¹

It is agreed on all hands that poems have been changed and adapted to a use different from that for which they were originally intended. But the acceptance of that general fact does not settle particular problems, each case must be dealt with on its own merits. It may be that such modification is simply an extension of the principle involved, as, for example, when a short simple poem celebrating the beauty of family or tribal gatherings is used to express the festive joy with which the representatives of the scattered tribes meet on Mount Zion (Ps. cxxxiii.)

¹ Briggs

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Behold how good and pleasant it is,
When brethren dwell together
Like the fine oil on the head,
Which flows down on the beard,
Which flows down upon the border of thy garment
Like the dew of Hermon.
For there hath Yahweh appointed a blessing,
Even life for evermore.

Here we have in a brief proverbial statement the blessing of family unity with the two comparisons, the festive oil with its sweetness of odour, and the fructifying dew of Mount Hermon. When Jerusalem became the one sanctuary and Mount Zion was the rallying place for the scattered remnants of Israel, the attempt to give a more ecclesiastical flavour even to this small poem was natural. With the omissions shown above we gain a more symmetrical structure; but if the suggestion of later additions is correct, these scholars of the ancient Jewish Church either did not understand the metrical structure of their own poems or made no serious attempt to preserve it. The main thing for them is the "Church"; the oil suggests not the home and the joys of hospitality but the consecration of the priest, and especially of the great high priest Aaron (Lev. viii. 30 *f.*).¹

It is a more difficult question when we ask concerning the originality of the closing words of Ps. li. As long as there was any possibility of retaining this poem for David those who desired to maintain that position could regard the prayer, "Build Thou the

¹ Duhm.

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walls of Jerusalem," as a later addition belonging to the time of the Exile. But when the psalm is accepted as a prayer of the late Jewish Church in its penitence and desire to offer a true worship, they cause no trouble.¹ If, however, we find here a personal confession and prayer, we shall be compelled to recognise in these verses the work of a churchman who wished by his interpretation of the poet's position to guard against depreciation of the ritual. As a matter of fact the expositor's view of particular points is very much influenced by his conception of the character and development of Israel's religion in the long course of its history.

Psalm i. is now regarded as a product of the legal period with its plain statement of punishment for the wicked and prosperity for the good and its picture of the ideal man as a diligent student of the written law. It was probably written as a preface for the whole book, showing the careful study of the scribe rather than the originality of the great poet. On this view the writer finds his ideal man in the words spoken to Joshua, "The book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate thereon day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein" (Josh. i. 8.). Usually one would say that the prose writer would quote from the poet, and not the reverse; but on this view the psalm is not a poem in the strictest sense, as the writer has taken the most picturesque feature of his small composition from

¹ Chap. XXVI.

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Jeremiah xvii. 7 *f.* "Blessed is the man that trusteth in Yahweh, and whose hope is Yahweh. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out his roots by the river, and shall not fear when heat cometh, but his leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." This seems to be a quite reasonable view, and it shows how we may gain a conviction as to the date and historical setting even of a small poem by considering its general tone and its relation to earlier literature. When we think we have reached a final conclusion on one small point there comes a suggestion that, after all, this is a poem of two strophes dealing simply with "the two ways," and that the beautiful illustration from Jeremiah was inserted by a later editor who, in this case may be said to have enriched the substance of the poem but destroyed its metrical structure, which is supposed to have been as follows :

Happy the man !

Who doth not walk in the counsel of wicked men,

And in the way of sinners doth not stand,

And in the session of scorners doth not sit down.

But rather in the Law of Yahweh is his delight,

And in His Law he studies day and night.

Not so the wicked !

But rather they are as the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Therefore wicked men will not rise up in the judgment,

And sinners (will not enter) into the congregation of righteous
men,

For Yahweh knoweth the way of righteous men,

But the way of wicked men will perish (everlastingly).¹

¹ Briggs.

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We are informed that keen critics had been over this ground but failing "to discern the gloss" they had not solved the riddle. So what with editors in the centuries before the beginning of our era and in the centuries after, we are presented with many problems when we begin "to study." We must console ourselves with the fact that our great English versions continue to do their work while we are investigating fine points, that such investigation, if carried on in the right spirit, brings us nearer to the ancient workers and so to one phase of the life of humanity, and that it is a true discipline to learn to view things in their right proportions. Facts of life and points of scholarship are not small or great in themselves, but in relation to the system to which they belong and to the whole human movement of which they form a part. Men may lose themselves in a crowd of minute details; they may try to fit all things into their own favourite forms; they may pride themselves on their pedantry and be covered with the mere dust of learning. But these are only the weaknesses of particular individuals, the excrescences of any great living movement. Let us who have other and, as we think, more important things to do, remember how much we owe to modest scholars who meditated day and night on these literary problems. Helpless creatures sometimes these men may have been from the standpoint of modern "efficiency," but they had their reward in the work that they loved, and in the fact that they were the means of preserving noble things which might otherwise have perished. To

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note their peculiarities, their love of theories, their interpretations of history, is to find that they are our kindred ; we have communion with them in our weaknesses and failures, as well as in the deep desires and noble hopes which are the common and permanent inheritance of mankind.

CHAPTER VI

ART OR PEDANTRY

THE ALPHABETICAL PSALMS

LITERATURE, which is the expression of human thought and life, strives after symmetry and beauty of form. In the Old Testament, at a time when the personal reputation or fame of the writer was not given any special prominence, and before men were consciously concerned with theories of æsthetics and poetics, we find in the noblest pieces the correspondence of clear vision and powerful appeal with artistic structure. Take, for example, the simple early narratives of Genesis or the great sermons of Isaiah and Amos. This harmony is carried to a lofty height in the dramatic poem which tells of the struggles of Job. The form is something that belongs to the time and place, and yet it is created and controlled to some extent by the passion that uses it. Hence the Old Testament contains great literature, not because men were striving after reputation or effect in that line, but rather because the great prophets were men of genius who were carried away by the great passions, faith in God, love of truth and righteousness, sympathy for the poor and oppressed. They pondered deeply their message,

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while they were musing the fire burned, and then the tongue found ready utterance; the message thus all aglow created for itself a form that arrested attention and left a deep impression. (Consider from this point of view the short, striking poem, "The Song of the Vineyard," Isa. v. 1-7). It is well for us to remember that in our Bible, the book that we call in the supreme sense The Revelation, the form in which the story is told or the sermon is delivered shows the marks of the highest human skill and care and may be called "popular" in the best sense (Ezek. xxxiii. 32). This could be most deeply felt by the original hearers, but even in a translation the strength and symmetry can be felt. At that time the play upon words and sounds had a significance which it has now lost; partly because to the ancients the word or name was a living thing and not a mere label, partly because the literary standards, which are to some extent local and artificial, have changed. Therefore it is not correct to speak of such word-plays as Babel and *balal* (to confound, Gen. xi. 9) or justice, *mishpat*, and oppression, *mispach* (Isa. v. 7), as "puns," because a "pun" is now considered to be a wretched thing, an unpardonable offence against good literary taste. Such allusions and assonances, which abound in early literature, are not to be so classed, because they show in a simple way real artistic genius without being consciously artificial. But when they are imitated and elaborated, we must admit that we pass into a region that tends towards the dreary and fantastic.

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One devout and enthusiastic scholar declares that "the Psalms are among the most wonderful products of human genius. No other writings but the Gospels can compare with them in grandeur and importance. The Gospels are greater, because they set forth the life and character of our Lord and Saviour. The Psalter expresses the religious experience of a devout people through centuries of communion with God. I cannot explain either Gospels or Psalms except as Books of God, as products of human religious experience, inspired and guided by the Divine Spirit" (Briggs). This is the sincere tribute of one who for the greater part of a lifetime studied the forms and teaching of these "songs of Zion." The "explanation" set forth in it is the one that has forced itself upon many of the noblest saints whom these plaintive utterances have "found" in hours of sorrow, calling to them out of the depths of a sorrow that was strangely like their own. It is true that there are many poems in the collection that considered as *literature* rise to the highest place, because genuine religious emotions are expressed in a form of almost perfect beauty and simplicity. It is also true that there is much commonplace material without special theological significance or original literary power. But seeing that we are mostly commonplace people with ordinary capacities and needs, that is part of the strength of the book. The age in which it was produced was not an age of the greatest literary activity; except those marvellous speeches of Job, there is nothing to rank with the early stories and original prophecies.

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It was not the destiny of this book to be set apart as "a product of human genius," the study of the few and the wonder of the many. It came from the common life and it has gone into the hearts and homes of common men. We need not be shocked by any candid reminder of its commonness, seeing that that is a part of its real strength and has enabled it to come into contact with "the people" and be enriched by their growing experience; we could not "read into it" so many later associations if the germ of them was not already there. "Laymen who only know the best poems in Luther's fresh, primitive, poetic, plastic speech have mostly a false conception of their originality, and so usually regard the Psalter as the classic example of oriental poetry, but whoever runs through the collection in the original text perceives the dominance of convention and the far reaching dependence of these poems on older models, and takes a more sober view." (Duhm). In this respect we also owe a great debt to the great English Version made during a flowering period of our language, so that the prayers and meditations from that distant time come to us in attractive forms and with appealing tones. But the task of trying to go behind these gracious sentiments and sweet associations need not be either unpleasant or irreverent.

In xxix., one of the nature Psalms, we have a striking picture, given in a few vivid, effective strokes. The introduction calls upon the Sons of God, or angels to pay homage to the name of Yahweh and to worship, arrayed in festal priestly garments.

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In the body of the poem we have a description of a violent storm sweeping across the country. The sevenfold "voice of Yahweh" represents the peals of thunder. There is a sense of exultation at this powerful manifestation of the strength and majesty of the God of Israel. The mountains dance, the great trees of the forest are broken, the earth trembles at the voice of the eternal King. The wilderness is shaken and the trees are stripped bare and whirled about in wild confusion. One would expect the poet to be terror-stricken, but he seems to feel a strange joy in the fact that his God has a complete mastery over weird forces and uses them to accomplish His will. So in the closing stanza he declares that Yahweh rules as everlasting King and will give both strength and peace to His people. "The beginning of the Psalm shows us the heavens open and the throne of God in the midst of the angelic songs of praise, and the close of the Psalm shows us, on earth, in the midst of the angry voice of Yahweh shaking all things, His people victorious and blessed with peace. *Gloria in excelsis* is the beginning, and *pax in terris* the end" (Delitzsch). Ewald, speaking of the central portion, says, "The whole depicts both the harsh and fearful, and again the easy and swift, skipping movement of the storm, its gradual progress, and at intervals sudden extension, and again sudden feebleness and languor, with creative power of representation." However one does not need to be a critic to appreciate the vigorous natural feeling and simple form of this piece.

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When we turn to the alphabetical poems we feel that this is just what is lacking, a poet of original power would scarcely submit himself to such a rigid limitation. xxv. and xxxiv. are strings of pearls, and they are certainly two of the finest specimens of their class, but even here it is often difficult to find any connection, either in the way of continuation or control in the thought. It may be that the Hebrew mind did not desire or prize logical sequence and intellectual movement as much as we do, and did not feel any jar in skipping about suddenly from one subject to another. From such psalms mottos for our exhortation may be selected, but they do not describe a definite situation or unfold a connected series of thoughts.

If one of them was set out before us in this fashion so as to make the alphabetical arrangement clear to the eye, it would tend to distract us rather than to kindle sympathetic appreciation.

“ Adore will I the Lord with all my heart,
Both in the meeting of the upright and in the congregation.
Confessedly great are the deeds of the Lord :
Delighters in them search them out.” (cxi. 1, 2.)

It may be, however, that ancient readers found it attractive to the eye and helpful to the memory. In the first part of cx., some scholars find the name Simon spelled by the five letters of these four lines, and in the last verse of xxv. and xxxiv. a suggestion of the name of the author or scribe, but we are not sure that Rabbinic subtlety had progressed so far. It is not necessary to arrange and analyse this class of psalm, as the statements they set forth and the

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sentiments they express may be found elsewhere with a real context.

The most elaborate specimen of this kind of Jewish literature is cxix. Here we have twenty-two sections, that is as many strophes as there are letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and in each section the lines beginning with the same letter, the first eight lines with a (aleph), the second with b (beth), and so on to the end. Then there are eight catchwords—or probably the author would prefer to call them watchwords; Law, Judgment, Testimony, Precept, Ordinance, Statute, Word, and Discourse. It has been maintained that within the strophes these words occur in a definite order (see Briggs).

- 9 By what means shall a young man cleanse his path ?
By taking heed thereto, according to Thy *word*.
- 11 Bending my whole heart, I have sought Thee :
O let me not err from Thy *commandments*.
- 11 Beneath the covert of my heart have I hid Thy *sayings*
That I might not sin against Thee.
- 12 Blessed art Thou, O Lord :
Teach me Thy *statutes*.
- 31 By my lips have I declared
All the *judgments* of Thy mouth.
- 14 Blessedness I find in the way of Thy *testimonies*
As much as in all riches.
- 15 By myself will I meditate in Thy *precepts* ;
And will have respect to Thy paths.
- 16 Blessed will I count myself in Thy *statutes*
I will not forget Thy word.

It is evident that this is a quite artificial structure, it smells of the lamp, though the author does not tell

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us how many measures of oil he used before he solved the problem. For him the result was an answer to the prayer

Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold
Wondrous things out of Thy Law.

For us it is a proof that Judaism has reached a scholastic period in which the written precepts begin to play a supreme part, and the scribe and student become fixed and important factors in the life of this people ; that of itself is a significant thing, it has had far-reaching consequences for the Jews, and the world. The worship of the book may have its dangers, but it has been one of the redemptive forces in the world. Certainly he might have expressed in briefer form all the distinctive thought that we have here, but it is evident that his soul found great satisfaction in this peculiar structure and formal elaboration, though perhaps even he may have felt sometimes that it could all be summed in the phrase "Great peace have they who love Thy law" (*v.* 165). Private prayer and personal study have now become real forces in a religion which cannot find full satisfaction in custom and ritual. He gives thanks at night and seven times a day he offers praise (*vv.* 62, 164). At night, when he reflects upon the glory of the divine, "the statutes" are his songs in the house of his pilgrimage. Men may have laughed at his devotion and called it fanaticism or pedantry, but even then he did not swerve from the law (*v.* 51). The glorification of the written law, which began in Deuteronomy, reaches here its highest point ; later

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Jewish scholars in attempting to transcend this fell into puerilities and absurdities. The Law has become a separate, almost a divine entity. A man holding this position would, if he had any prominence, encounter the opposition of Syrian princes and worldly priests.¹ It is well to remember that men shed their blood for the preservation of the book, and the observance of the Law. In our time, when there is little danger from "pedantry" of this particular kind, we must remember our debt of gratitude to students of the past. They carefully preserved the living words which the world could not afford to lose. In so far as this man tends to put "the Law" in the place of God, he favours slavery towards a stereotyped written form. If we sum up the teaching of his laborious psalm in a short phrase, it means that the Law serves all purposes of revelation and instruction, and meets all needs of social life and Jewish piety; it is a source of strength and a cause of merit, in fact no emergency can arise in which its perfection is not seen. We can no longer give such absolute praise to "the law of Moses"; when we desire to see growing wonders in the divine revelation, we are thinking of the fulness of light that comes through our study of history, the constitution of the world and "the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6).

¹ See Chap. XXXIII.

CHAPTER VII

THE HYMN BOOK

SINGING and shouting with rhythmic movement played a part in the most primitive worship ; but when " a church " in the more modern sense came into existence, with clear beliefs and organised ritual, " the hymn-book " became a branch of religious literature and a province of human life. In our day " hymnology " is an important sphere of investigation, with its history of sacred music and liturgical praise. The psalms have maintained their place in chants or metrical versions. Some of the great Latin hymns now speak to us in our own tongue so that any good collection may be called " hymns ancient and modern." The " communion of saints " is in great measure kept alive by the fact that in our common worship we send to heaven, as a spiritual sacrifice, our sighs, our fears, our hopes and joys in noble words that come to us from a long succession of inspired poets. We can no longer draw a crude distinction between divine psalms and " human hymns." The divine must come to us in human form, saturated with the experience of men and women who have groaned under the burden of sin and rejoiced in the sense of God's forgiving love. Different branches of the Church have given something of their own character to their own hymn books,

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and in recent times there has been an effort to give a "catholicity" to our books of praise by claiming the sacred songs of all ages and all branches of the Church as part of our common heritage. In one of the earliest Christian records we read "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives" (Matt. xxv. 1, 30). This hymn is supposed to have been certain psalms that were used in the Passover Service (cxv.-cxviii.). The word of Christ dwelling in the Christian disciple manifests itself in "admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." By this period the psalm had taken its place in the temple, the synagogue, and the home as an expression of the spirit of worship.

The hymns or "praise songs" in the strictest sense were used in general worship and for special acts and occasions. The shortest psalm in the whole collection might be used in an opening ascription of praise or a closing doxology.

O praise Yahweh, all ye nations ;
Laud Him, all ye peoples ;
For His mercy is mighty toward us ;
And Yahweh's faithfulness abides for ever (cxvii).

The Psalter in its present form, closes with a triumphant burst of praise to Yahweh. It is debated whether He is to be praised "in His sanctuary" or "for His sanctity," but it is clear that the full orchestra is turned on to make a joyful noise in His honour ; the worshippers will sing and chant and the music will come crashing in as the climax of some festive assembly.

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A number of these songs of praise probably existed as a separate collection which was broken up by the latest compiler. These have as their title "praise ye Yah," i.e., Hallelujah. At present they are in four groups, civ.-cvii. ; cxi.-cxvii. ; cxxxv.-cxxxvi. ; cxlvi.-cl. If cxlvii., cxlviii. belong to a later time, the original number was sixteen ; there was a tendency among later scribes to give this title to the other psalms that had been placed between these groups, even to the long alphabetical Psalm cxix., which was a learned exercise probably never intended to be sung. With certain brilliant exceptions, as the splendid nature psalm (civ.), and the story of man's discipline through sorrow (cvii.), the literary quality is not high ; the men who composed them were diligent students rather than men of creative power ; cxxxvi., whether in its original form or as later adapted for use in the synagogue, is an interesting specimen of a responsive reading or of a congregational refrain to the soloist or reader. The goodness of Yahweh is declared ; His acts in creation and history passed in review with the repeated acknowledgment, "For His mercy (endureth) forever." It is evident that the later liturgies of the Jewish and Christian Church have here their real beginnings. This particular hymnbook is in the main a secondary stratum of the psalm literature, many of the more original psalms appear to have been meant for use in the sanctuary or were easily adapted to that purpose. In the Chronicles we have the tradition that David was the first to ordain this kind of worship, and part of Ps. cv. is inserted as a specimen. These

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psalms belong to a quite late period, and the temple worship received its richest developments after the Exile. In Ezra iii. 11, we read " And they sang one to another in praising and giving thanks to Yahweh. For He is good, for His mercy endureth forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised Yahweh, because the foundation of the house of Yahweh was laid." This, however, is many centuries after David brought the ark to Jerusalem and from this later period the Hymn Book began to be arranged and its various parts assigned to ordinary sabbath worship or to special fasts and feasts. To-day we have in our churches this kind of book in fuller form, with various sections arranged according to theological subjects, classes within the congregation, or varied times and seasons. At such times, when sins had been confessed, mercies acknowledged, prayers presented, it was considered appropriate for all the people to say " Amen " (1 Chron. xvi. 36 ; Ps. cvi. 48).

Hymns were sung as people and priests approached the temple, or as with rejoicing they circled its precincts and entered its courts. Glad response was made to the invitation

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.

This short powerful hymn (Ps. c.) survives through all these centuries because of its simplicity of structure and strength of sentiment. It is a simple creed, it bases itself upon the fact that there is one

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God the creator of His people, whose mercy and faithfulness abide through all the ages. Of a similar simplicity and strength is Ps. xcv. In a somewhat patronising tone it has been called "a harmless liturgical composition"; for "harmless" we would substitute "helpful"; its clearness, its lack of subtlety or sentimentalism is an advantage, as we turn the cold page it sings itself to us in tones of well-remembered chants, and the atmosphere of the sanctuary rises round our souls.

O come, let us sing unto Yahweh;
Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.
Let us behold His face with thanksgiving,
Let us make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms.
For Yahweh is a great God
And a great King above all gods.

Commonplace enough at the present stage of the world's theological history, but by no means tawdry, it possesses an inspiring power because it is the kind of commonplace that had to be won by centuries of toil and thought, and that each living man must gain for himself. It turns into a sermon at the close, but can we be so sure on that account that, as some scholars think, we have two fragments tacked together by a later editor? At any rate, the collocation gives a fine suggestion. The putting together of two poems in Ps. xix. gives us the thought of Nature and Law, "the starry heavens above and the moral law within"; so here coming into the presence of the One God we are reminded of the shadow that falls across national history and personal

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life from our lack of responsiveness to the divine voice. The purpose or at least the effect of these popular hymns was to take the creed that had come into being through the teaching of prophets and the experience of the nation and make it the common property of the Jew and of mankind. The "classic" poem may be appreciated by the few; the "common-place hymn" may carry through the ages and to the crowd the central themes of a great faith. It was a glorious anthem, whether for the original ark or a later dedication of the temple, when the singers cried :

Lift up your heads, O ye gates,
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of Glory shall come in,

calling forth the question from their companions

Who is this King of Glory ?

which was followed by the proud response :

Yahweh strong and mighty,
Yahweh mighty in battle. (Ps. xxiv.)

It is possible that this poem consisting of a comparatively few lines is composed of three fragments, which are simply put together without logical movement or mediation. God the creator of the world, not the modern "universe" but the small world of Hebrew knowledge; the God of Israel who is worshipped on "the hill of Yahweh" by the worshipper who has clean hands and a pure heart; the warrior God whose "glory" is shown in scattering the enemy and defending His people. Evidently

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the Hebrew mind was not oppressed by the demand for rigid unity and coherence which seem so important to us ; or is there an unconscious feeling that all vital things are drawn together by their relation to the one God ? Ps. xciii. is a striking poem, arranged for worship, glorifying Yahweh as King of the world—Yahweh reigneth—telling of His establishment of judgment and righteousness in Jacob, and of kingship and priesthood in Israel ; probably after each section the people took up the refrain “ Holy is He.”

Ps. xxxiii. is another specimen of the hymn which calls upon the righteous to rejoice in Yahweh and to make a skilful use of instruments in public worship. It is of the same class as those already mentioned, being made up of quotations from many sources set side by side for the purpose of being chanted. The number of its verses or double lines is the same as that of the Hebrew alphabet, and that was probably intentional ; at the late period when such psalms were produced, pious students had great satisfaction in arranging well known statements in a new form ; they were not seeking literary fame, but hoped to serve the cause of pure Jewish piety. With unpretentious skill the author has arranged his material and sought to stimulate the spirit of praise.

Ps. xcvi. and xcvi. have liveliness and strength ; if we cannot call them “ lyrics,” they are good chants, expressing the hard-won faith that idols are nothing, but that Yahweh, who has done great things in the past, reigns in the present, and will come to judg-

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ment. These great phrases should express for us something larger and more complex, but they mark out for all time the main lines of any noble theology. Such compositions as these may not need much "study" from those who are familiar with the Hebrew documents, but the men who prepared them were students and they wished to sing their creed, to sing and make melody in their hearts unto Yahweh. No doubt in that day there were silly songs and frivolous jingles, home-grown or imported from Syria and Greece, but such things were unworthy of sober, pious men. Intense devotion to their own creed may have dulled their perception of some charming graceful things in the worldly literature, but the makers of hymn books have rendered a lasting service. These have become more elaborate as to their literature and music; all classes and types of men have contributed such treasures; but our permanent obligation to the Jewish Church can never be overshadowed, even by this noble poetry. We sometimes complain that worship has become cold and conventional, that it is artificial and out of touch with the realities of life, and yet there are many who feel that without this form of communion with God and fellowship with each other life would be poorer. In these matters the training of our childhood and the associations of our youth count for much. If this noble hymn does not add to our knowledge, it may quicken in us the desire for worship and make us feel that we have fellowship with those to whom the praise of God has been an essential part of life.

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O sing unto Yahweh a new song ;
For He hath done marvellous things ;
His right hand and His holy arm hath wrought salvation
for Him.

Yahweh hath made known His salvation ;
His righteousness hath He openly shown in the sight of all
the nations (xcviii.).

CHAPTER VIII

THE SONGS OF ZION

IN Ps. cxxxvii., which expresses the sorrow and pictures the perplexity of the exiles in Babylon, the conquerors are represented as demanding "one of the songs of Zion," and this raises an important question—"How can we sing Yahweh's song in a foreign land?" Here we have two aspects of a great movement, the attempt of Hebrew religion to maintain itself under new circumstances and in strange places, and also the close relation of this religion to its own soil, and in particular to the central sanctuary at Jerusalem. While out of the Jewish religion there has sprung the most spiritual and universal religion, the pre-Christian Jews themselves never freed their religion completely from national influences and local limitation. In the earlier prophetic days the great teachers are fighting their own battles and solving their own problems; they have to make clear what religion really means to those who are servants of Yahweh. The time for theological speculation as to the great outside world has not yet come. The universalism of the prophets consists not in theory, but in the fact that they proclaim the moral nature of religion; and morality, rightly understood, is not like ritual, tribal and local. In later times there appears the direct claim: in

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some form of world supremacy, the Jew is to be either a God-appointed ruler or a divinely instructed servant, but in all cases there is this limitation, that Jerusalem is to be the centre of the world. In that noble poem, Isaiah xxv. 6f, where the poet shows a sympathetic spirit towards the sorrows of humanity, there is promised *to all peoples* a feast of fat things. We rejoice when we meet this large outlook, this broad, unsectarian spirit. We feel that the spirit of a great religion is chafing against national barriers, but there always remains this limitation that for the divine consolation men must come to Jerusalem, the great feast will be "in this mountain." The Psalter stands squarely on that position; it has attained to the same extent the universal positions, it can call on all nations, as well as all angels and powers of nature, to worship Yahweh, but the place of His special presence in this world and the centre of the world's spiritual life is Jerusalem. There is one city that shall stand in peace and security in spite of convulsions that shake the world, and desolations that are abroad in the earth.

Yahweh is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved :
Yahweh shall help her, at the turning of the morning (xlvi. 5).
Great is Yahweh and highly to be praised,
In the city of our God, in His holy mountain,
Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth,
In Mount Zion on the sides of the north,
The city of the great King (xlviii. 1-2).

Even at this distance of time our hearts are moved by the enthusiastic reverence of the patriot for this ancient city of God.

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Walk about Zion, and go round about her ;
Tell the towers thereof,
Mark ye well her bulwarks,
 Consider her palace ;
That ye may tell it to the generation following,
For such a God is Yahweh for ever and ever.

The beauty of Jerusalem, the dazzling splendour of Zion, rests upon the fact that the God of Israel has chosen her as His dwelling and the centre from which His life may radiate. " Sing praises to Yahweh who dwelleth in Zion " (ix. 11). He " chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which He loved, and He built His sanctuary like the heights " (lxxviii. 68). " Yahweh is great in Zion ; and He is high above all the peoples " (xcix. 2). " In Judah, God is known ; His name is great in Israel. In Salem also is His tabernacle and His dwelling-place in Zion " (lxxvi. 1, 2). In almost a third of these poems such direct references are found and it is evident that many of the others belong to the service of " the sanctuary." This glorification of Jerusalem has become a thing of world-wide significance. Not only is the name a symbol of the ideal community, the eternal city of God which men continue to seek on the earth and in the heavens. The soil is still " sacred " to Jews, Mohammedans, and many Christians not merely as a matter of history and sentiment, but as a part of earth that is really nearer to heaven. This is an intensely human element which we will not soon lose. We all need the support of hallowed memories and sacred associations, and there are millions on this earth who cannot yet rise to the faith that " every place is hallowed ground."

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The Jewish explanation of the pre-eminence of Jerusalem in the sphere of religion and of all the loyal sentiment that has gathered round it is

For Yahweh hath chosen Zion,
He hath desired it for His habitation (cxxxii. 13).

History has surely justified this great faith in a larger sense than those struggling patriots dreamed of ; for " the songs of Zion " have gone round the world carrying comfort and hope. But on the human side, the story of this election is long and varied. No doubt there was in that place a sanctuary and a citadel in the earliest days, but when David about a thousand years before the Christian era made it the capital of his kingdom, and brought to it the ark of Yahweh, it entered into Hebrew life and into world history. Simply as a royal sanctuary it was bound to hold a high place in Judah. But for some centuries there were other Israelite sanctuaries, and while the Northern Kingdom flourished Samaria was in some sense a rival city. Even in later times the Samaritans kept alive some pretension to religious rivalry (John iv. 20). But with the destruction of Samaria, 721 B.C., the religious prestige of Jerusalem increased. The great prophet Isaiah by his faithful service did much to create the spiritual significance of the city that he loved. His was a message of judgment but not without hope. Here we have something more original and creative than the treatment of the later psalms.

How has the faithful city become a harlot !
Zion filled with judgment, righteousness lodged in her !
Thy silver has become dross, thy drink adulterated ;

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Thy princes are rebellious and companions of thieves ;
They all love bribes and seek after rewards ;
The widow's cause comes not to them, the fatherless they do
not judge.

Therefore, saith Yahweh, the Mighty One of Israel,
Ah, let Me ease Me of Mine adversaries, and avenge Me of My
foes,

And I will turn My hand against thee, and purify thee with lye,
Thy dross will I remove, all thine alloy.

And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy coun-
sellors as at the beginning :

Afterwards thou shalt be called Town of Righteousness,
Faithful City (Isa. i. 21-26).

It was this kind of teaching that became the basis of Zion's real greatness, so that a later poet could look forward with hope to the time when people of the outside would be drawn to the city by the attractive power of a divine light (Isa. ii. 2-4). After much toil, many of the local sanctuaries with their licentious worship were swept away, and attempts were made to purify the worship and life of Jerusalem. Jeremiah had to protest against the fanatical trust in the sanctuary and its worship. Then came the great catastrophe when the city was laid in ruins and the temple burned to the ground. Men uttered the pathetic cry, " How hath Yahweh covered Zion with a cloud in His anger ! He hath cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel " (Lam. ii. 1) ; and with sorrowful astonishment they asked, " Is this the city that men called the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth " ? (ii. 15). This tiny nation was not crushed, though wounded in this vital part ; it had lost everything

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but its soul, and that soul in the time of exile yearned for Jerusalem. After the restoration all that was left was a small community in and near the city, so that Jerusalem was the centre of a limited circle of worshippers. True there were Jews in other lands who looked to Zion as the city of God and in their prayers turned towards the home of their fathers. The words, "I will worship toward Thy holy temple" (cxxxviii. 2), "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined forth," came to have a meaning far outside the city limits. At a still later time the cry was extorted, "O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance; Thy holy temple have they defiled" (lxxix. 1). But after a fierce conflict, their temple became for the Jews once more a delight and pride, until the tragic day when the Romans crushed this stubborn people and Jerusalem became for them simply a place of weeping. Once more they had to ponder the sad question, "Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is thy God?" The Jew carried his sorrow into a cold, cruel world, but the psalms have enshrined in immortal words his love for the sacred city (cxxxvii. 5).

What then is the picture of Zion that we can glean from the direct references in the Psalter? The city has its rich associations and sacred memories, but the temple is the centre, the crown of its beauty and the source of its life. It seemed strong as well as beautiful, so that the poet could say, "They that trust in Yahweh are as mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abideth forever." In the memory of its sons and in the sight of the world, with all its sorrows

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this strange city still abides. It is difficult for us to fathom the depth of patriotic feeling and religious satisfaction that lies behind the familiar words, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of Yahweh. Our feet are standing within thy gates, O Jerusalem" (cxxii. 1, 2). How could men be so perverse as not to see and acknowledge divine beauty? "Let them be ashamed and turned backward, all they that hate Zion." This beauty and worth shall, however, find its due acknowledgment. "Because of Thy temple, at Jerusalem, kings shall bring presents unto Thee (lxviii. 29; cf. Isa. lx. 10, 11).

For the Jew this is essentially the place of worship where "the children of Zion" (cxliv. 2) are called to "be joyful in their King" and to "praise His name in the dance." Here we have the testimony that, though the ritual has been purified and elaborated, joy has not been completely banished from worship. There is a fuller recognition of sin, and fasting has its place, but we cannot think of men having such an intense longing (xlii.) for something that was quite prosaic and dull. The poet who has appealed to all of us could express his keen desire to dwell for length of days in the house of Yahweh (xxiii). It was a desirable thing to behold the beauty of Yahweh in the morning in His temple (xxvii. 4). There is the ring of genuine enthusiasm in such words as these "Yahweh, I love the habitation of Thy house, And the place where Thy glory dwelleth." Surely this is a real element of the highest human life; if we lose the joy of worship

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we shall not be in any sense richer. These men were not mistaken in the belief that it was in the sanctuary that they found strength to bear their burdens and fight their battles. From the fulness of their own experience they could say to the king on his throne or to the peasant at the plough, "Send thee help from His sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion" (xx. 2). "The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion; and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life" (cxxviii. 5).

Thus we see that Zion, the mother of true saints, the city of the living God, holds a central position and plays a living part in these poems. Men turn to this place to find a deeper realisation of God's presence; they wash their hands in innocency, so that they may compass His altar (xxvi. 6; cf. xv.); they pay their vows in the presence of His people (cxvi. 14); they bring an offering and come into His courts. From that place come answers to prayer and manifestations of light and joy. If in all this there is no real increase of theological teaching, there is a proof that this teaching has come home with power to the hearts of common men. Here, in a supreme sense, man shows his need and capacity for worship. The songs of Zion, in times when there was danger of a hard formalism, expressed the sense of personal need, the passionate desire for pardon and inspiration, which give reality to all worship, and so they have found and kept their place in the richest liturgies and in the barest forms of public worship.

CHAPTER IX

THE PILGRIM PSALMS

(Pss. cxx.—cxxxiv.)

THIS group of Psalms probably formed a small book before it was incorporated in the general collection ; with the exception of cxxxii., which may be a later addition, they are all short and of high literary quality. In poems, at any rate, size is not the measure of greatness. In our English versions we are familiar with the title " a song of degrees " or " Ascents," but the explanation of this phrase is still unsettled. The suggestion that " degrees " refers to the fifteen temple steps, from the court of the women to that of the men, has no secure basis and does not suit the character of these songs. The theory that in this title we have a reference to the stairlike structure of the parallelism is quite artificial, as this structure is not carried out to the same degree in all of them and is found elsewhere :—

Yahweh strong and *mighty*,
Yahweh *mighty* in battle (xxiv. 8).
Yahweh, how *many* are mine adversaries !
Many are rising up against me ;
Many are saying of me :
" There is no salvation for him " (iii. 2, 3).

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May Yahweh cut off every flattering *lip*,
And every *tongue* speaking great words ;
Those who say " To our *tongues* we give might,
Our *lip* is our own ; who is lord over us ? " (xii. 4, 5).

I lift up mine eyes unto the mountains. Whence cometh my
help ?

Help is from Yahweh, Maker of heaven and earth.

May He not suffer my foot to be moved, (and) may He that
keepeth me not *slumber*.

Lo ! He *slumbereth* not, and He *sleepeth* not, the *Keeper* of
Israel.

Yahweh thy keeper, Yahweh is thy shade on thy right hand.

By day the sun will not smite thee, nor the moon by night.

Yahweh will *keep* thee from every evil, He will *keep* thy person.

Yahweh will keep thy going out and thy coming in from this
time forth and for evermore (cxxi.).

This structure has a certain rhetorical effectiveness and poetic power ; without being too artificial it furnishes a striking form for the thought. But it is not likely that we find here " the degrees " or " ascents."

We are left, then, with the explanation that the word " ascents " refers to the going up of pilgrims to the temple at Jerusalem (cf. Isa. xxx., 29 ; Ps. xlii. 4). Though some of them may not be of a " processional " character they have a similarity of structure and tone, both musical and spiritual, and form a small book of meditation and song suitable for the use of pious men, who in the Greek period travelled to the old home to pay homage to the God of their fathers. We may find in this small collection the types of thought and varieties of experience that receive a fuller expression elsewhere, but, as the book is small and the particular poems brief, we are invited to a rapid survey.

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cxx. To cry unto Yahweh in distress is a common attitude of the Psalmists; they find in prayer relief from the burdensome struggle of life. Here we have a sigh of sorrow and a cry of lamentation from a man who is weary of strife. It does not seem specially suitable to a pilgrim unless *v. 5* were by mistake interpreted literally, and the poet, like the author of *xlii.*, supposed to long for peace in the sanctuary. Some men find pleasure in polemic and joy in battle; other sensitive souls, like a Jeremiah, shrink from harsh conflict. "Misunderstanding," as we call it, is a frequent cause of pain; because of difference of temperament or point of view men of the same family or church will worry and weaken each other. With exhaustion and impatience a man cries out, Why cannot we have "peace"? oh, for a little peace, to live one's life and do one's work. But there are some of our brethren, perhaps not as perverse as we picture them, who vote for war. Whether a man is right or wrong the pain of being slandered is intense. Sharp arrows and burning coals have reached the raw flesh. By the imputation of false motives the soul is made to writhe. The consolation in such distress is that there is One who knows, and in the calm light of whose presence things are rightly judged.

cxxi. The sacred song, "I to the hills will lift mine eyes, etc." is familiar to us in several versions. It has come down through the ages gathering sweet and blessed associations. The same theme is wrought out more fully in another well-known psalm (*xci.*), which is dedicated to the praise of Yahweh's kindly

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providence. "I will say of Yahweh, He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in whom I will trust." A dweller on the plain looks up to the mountains, where the God of Israel has His dwelling-place (lxxxvii., cxxviii.). The question rises to his lips, "Whence comes my help?" The answer is ready, My God, who is "the maker of heaven and earth" is "the keeper of Israel," who exercises ever watchful care over those who trust Him. The special dangers mentioned here are sunstroke and the baleful influence of the moon. Going out to work, and coming home to rest, the servant of Yahweh is under His kindly care. A noble faith, giving calmness and strength for the common tasks of life.

cxxii. A real pilgrim psalm; the writer was glad when there was invitation to go up to Yahweh's house. Standing within the gates of Jerusalem, Jews from other lands can feel that they are united with their brethren of the same faith and that they have a common heritage in their glorious history. It is a beneficent law, a noble custom, that the tribes of Israel should thus go up to give thanks to the name of Yahweh. Jerusalem gives blessing to her children, but she also needs their prayers. (Compare the tone of this psalm with the confidence and enthusiasm of Ps. xlviii.). The departing pilgrim prays for the peace of Jerusalem. For the sake of his companions, and for the sake of the house of Yahweh, he will utter the prayer, "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces."

cxxiii. This poem, if it comes to us in its original form, combines lowly patient waiting with eager

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desire. It contains one striking figure, one expression of faith, one eager prayer. As servants wait in expectation for the commands or gifts of their lord, so the pious Israelite waits upon his God. In His own time He will be gracious; the servant must learn to labour and to wait. It has been suggested that in later times of division and persecution the last two verses were added to express importunity; but so quick and subtle is the movement of the human soul that, even while professing patience and hope, the vision of the careless, arrogant, contemptuous opponents might extort the cry, "Be gracious unto us even now, O Yahweh." We know that "the pious" in those days believed in supernatural help rather than in human aggression, but sometimes the cry went up to Him that sits in the heavens, "O Yahweh, how long?"

cxxiv. The next in order is appropriately an expression of gratitude, an acknowledgment of great deliverances in the past. The enemies of Israel are likened to the angry torrents which sometimes sweep along carrying all before them; if it had not been for the protection of their God, many a time the nation would have been quite overwhelmed; or, to change the figure, these same foes were like beasts of prey, cruel and destructive. Ruin at times seemed imminent, the nation was like a bird about to be caught in the trap, when Yahweh intervened and broke the snare. Not by cleverness of man did salvation come, "Our help is in the name of Yahweh, who made heaven and earth."

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cxxv. also forms a good connection when it declares that, "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so Yahweh is round about His people." Here, however, we have the moral conditions on which security and prosperity rest. The poet is confident that the sceptre of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous. Either the original writer or a later one living in troubled times has added the thought that, if that were so, righteous men might be tempted to put forth their hands to evil (cf. Ps. lxxiii.). Let Yahweh give prosperity to the upright; but, as for those who in their weakness and shallowness turn to crooked ways, they will find their place and punishment with the wicked.

cxxvii. brings us to personal and family life in which the same principles prevail as in the community. It is probable that we have two short poems, each with its own theme, the first setting forth man's utter dependence upon Yahweh in the building of the house, guarding the city, or pursuing the round of daily tasks. Unfortunately, the favourite phrase, "He giveth His beloved sleep," is uncertain. "He giveth to His beloved in sleep" is just as doubtful. "He giveth sufficiency to His friends" is an attractive conjecture. Second, we have the statement that a large family is a blessing from God, and a support to the father. In days when men had to defend their own personal rights and war was a constant danger, a number of stalwart sons were a joy and protection.

cxxviii. The next psalm shows the blessedness of family life and faithful piety from the inside of the

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home. The blessing that is desired for the religious man is success in his daily toil and happiness in his home. Barrenness in those days was regarded as a curse ; that the wife might be a fruitful vine and the children like olive plants round the table was an appropriate blessing when life was simple and the struggle for existence severe. Without this blessing the Jews could not have faced persecutions and continued their testimony.

cxxix. Here we have a different temper with its memories of past enemies and its curse upon the present foes. It was probably written at a time of persecution, when sharp conflicts brought to mind the long story of past distress. It is wonderful that the nation has survived the centuries of trouble since the deliverance from Egypt. It had not possessed the happiness of having no history. Its story stands out as one continuous tragedy. Shall there not be retribution, will not Yahweh visit upon the persecutors the sufferings that they have brought upon His people ? The saint of olden time has no compunction in invoking " the law of like " (Ps. cxxxvii. 8, 9), in praying that the enemies of Israel be like a scanty harvest, drawn from a shallow soil, not sufficient to fill the hands or call for a blessing.

cxxx. This is one of the so called " penitential psalms," though it can scarcely be said to belong strictly to that class. The phrase " de profundis"—out of the depths—has become classic. Out of the depths of sin and sorrow where can man turn but to his God ? Man cannot stand before God in the strength of innocence, but he can cast himself upon

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the free forgiveness of heaven. With this faith he can wait with eagerness more than those who in the night of sorrow wait for the morning light. Kindness and redemption are with Yahweh ; the deliverance that comes from Him is a sign of restoration and blessing.

cxxxii. The submissive soul compared, in a striking figure, to a weaned child, which after struggle rests in weariness and content upon its mother's breast. Haughtiness is abandoned, great problems left in the care of God. This is the conclusion of the whole matter. " Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul." After feverish questioning and restless strife, peace comes through surrender to the divine will. The child has lost this particular battle, but it still has the mother's presence and love.

cxxxiii. Probably a family psalm which has been adapted to church purposes by the references to Aaron and Mount Zion (See Chap. X). The dwelling of brethren together is good and lovely, like the goodly oil upon the head, which flows down upon the beard, or like the dew upon Mount Hermon. To sit together in festive joy and spiritual unity is a rich blessing and a sign of divine approval.

cxxxiv. In the solemn night there are those who stand in the temple of Yahweh. Not in sloth or fear must they spend their time, but in worship, until morning light, when others come to take their place. These servants in the temple courts should lift up their hands towards the holy place and bless Yahweh, the Maker of heaven and earth. The night had its mysterious terrors in days when artificial light was

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scarce and dim, but the presence of God is the true light of the soul.

Even in this small book, which is in some respects a summary of the whole collection, we meet with worshippers in many moods of sorrow and joy, disappointment and hope. The pilgrim psalms served a high purpose in the later days of Judaism, and, though rooted in the soil from which they sprang, they have sufficient in them of the universal life to give them an abiding power. Life is still a pilgrimage, even to those who believe that all places are sacred, and it needs songs of faith and worship.

CHAPTER X

THE THEOLOGY OF THE PSALTER

THERE is a common feeling against the use of the word "theology" in this connection, as if it were some abstract theory far away from the realities of religious experience and the needs of worship. It has been called "a meaningless jangle about unintelligible chimeras," and, if that were a correct description, then the less we had to do with it the better. Some who claim to represent not scepticism but religion, have regarded "theology" as a curse that tends to paralyse faith and deaden the finer spiritual feelings. But, however much we may dread a cold intellectualism and shrink from futile subtleties, we must recognise that neither feeling nor action can be divorced from thought. It is perhaps possible for theology, when it has become systematic and scholastic, to lose touch with realities and cease to quicken faith. But that simply means that all forms of thought may become a hindrance when they cease to grow and fail to represent the richer experience of mankind. The psalms are not theological treatises, they are religious poems; but behind the expressions they use there is a view of God and the world which in its substance and form is coloured by the theological beliefs of a particular time. The divisions that we make to-day between science and

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theology, poetic suggestion and literal fact, are sharper and stronger now than in those earlier days, and our Western attitude of mind to such things is different from that of Orientals.

Such a passage as the following must make a different impression on the minds of men who think of God as dwelling in heaven, above the earth but not very distant, a God in immediate contact with these mighty forces, from what it does on those who are thinking of an immense universe of globes rolling in infinite space and governed through a net-work of complex laws. The awful and the sublime in nature may affect our feelings in a similar way; we may cower before the storm or exult in its wild grandeur, but our different way of thinking would make itself felt in our theology and even in our poetry :

The waters saw Thee, O God,
The waters saw Thee, they were afraid ;
The depths also trembled.
The clouds poured out water ;
The skies sent out a sound ;
Thine arrows also went abroad.
The voice of Thy thunder was in the whirlwind ;
The lightnings lightened the world ;
The earth trembled and shook.
Thy way was in the sea,
And Thy paths in the great waters,
And Thy footsteps were not known.

(Ps. lxxvii. 16-19 ; cf. also xviii. and 1.)

In these pictures of the appearance of God to His people, which may be found in history, prophecy and psalm, there may be a faint remembrance of

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ancient mythologies and the storm-god of primitive times, but they have now become a part of the common tradition, in which Hebrew poetry expresses the sense of Yahweh's terrible majesty when He is roused to activity by the prayers of His people or the arrogance of the oppressors. Such pictures have a permanent poetic value, and serve a purpose that can never be accomplished by abstract definitions.

Mythology, a word which no longer has any terrors, belongs to a time before theology, in the stricter sense, had arisen. In wonderful stories, which now seem to us to be fanciful or even grotesque, men told of the doings of the gods, their battles with great monsters, and with each other. Remote from us as such stories are, they mark a stage in man's upward struggle towards light and the search for law. The science, theology and poetry of primitive men were blended in these narratives that reflected thoughts and impressions concerning the great world. The problem of light and darkness, good and evil, was in a simple way involved in these myths and legends. The Hebrews, because of their faith in one God, at first the God of their nation and then of the whole world, transformed such of these stories as they were able to use, and no doubt rejected many as childish tales or heathen foolishness. But they, as we now know, came late upon the stage of history, and like ourselves owed much of their scheme of thought to those who had gone before. The revelation given to them of the oneness of God, growing constantly in its power, imparted unity to

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their thought and made them bold to claim the whole world for their God. He was not a light-god though He could clothe Himself in light; He was the creator of light. Sun and moon and stars of light are His creatures and obey His will. When a people believe in one God who is at the centre of things, and judge all things in relation to Him, they have a theology. To them God is the creator of this world, of man, and of all the creatures in it.

It is He that made us, and His we are ;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

We have no discussion of the processes of creation and the making of things "out of nothing"; that kind of investigation belongs to a later stage of thought. It is sufficient to be able to say,

By Yahweh's word the heavens were made ;
And all their host by the breath of His mouth.
He gathereth the waters together as in a bottle ;
He layeth up the deeps in storehouses.
Let all the earth fear Yahweh ;
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
For He spoke and it came to pass ;
He commanded and it stood forth (xxxiii. 6-9).

The world to the Hebrew poets was a "cosmos," an ordered world. Their knowledge of astronomy and geography was small; they thought of the world as resting on the waters, the roots of the mountains went down into the deeps and served as pillars, the sky was an arch over the earth, a firmament separating earth from heaven, and above this dividing line there were storehouses for waters, hail and snow. Still higher there was the heavenly sanctuary,

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Yahweh's dwelling place, of which Jerusalem was the representative on earth. The sun, moon and stars, the winds and lightning, are no longer "gods," but creatures of Yahweh, ministers of His pleasure, manifestations of His presence. Angels there were who waited on His will, attendants and servants in the royal palace, but no "gods" at all comparable to Him. This view may seem to us to be childlike, pictorial, but it has in it the essence of a real theology, the belief that all the forces of nature and all forms of life have their source in one central power. When modern astronomy first brought home to the mind and imagination of men the vastness of the universe, and shrivelled up all small conceptions of nature, many were troubled concerning the influence on theology; it seemed to have taken God from us and given us merely "planets," "orbits," and "laws." But faith reasserts itself and conquers the world for God. It is well also to remember that the poet long ago (Ps. viii., Chap. XV.) had to wrestle with the great contrast, the greatness of God who can make such a world as this and the littleness of the sons of men. Though the ancient Hebrews were not philosophers in the strictest sense, they found that without which any philosophy is a failure, a principle of unity in the God who had spoken to their fathers and whose will was supreme in all realms of life. Such a faith must clothe itself in the highest intellectual forms known to the age in which it manifests its power, it must have an interpretation of history, an answer to present problems, and a programme for the future.

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At the present time, we talk much about historical movements, of development and perspective in this connection. We look down the long vista of the past and see how small beginnings, that seemed insignificant at the time, have grown to world-wide influence. The gift of historical criticism has been called the special gift of God to our own generation. We do not now attempt to explain the attitude and temper of any great nation without taking into account the influence of inward struggles and outward circumstances upon its history and character. We are only now beginning to realise fully that the Hebrews had a glimpse of the meaning of history, and that we lost something of this by setting their thought in rigid forms and making their history in a mechanical way a mere symbol of our own beliefs. The Deuteronomic preacher (Deut. viii.) and the great prophet of the Exile (Isa. xl.) claimed that their own history was a great movement, in which the guidance of God was manifested for their own discipline and the blessing of the world. Many psalmists take this teaching and turn it into grateful song.¹

He made known His ways unto Moses,
His doings unto the children of Israel (ciii. 7).
We have heard with our ears O God, our fathers have told us,
What work Thou didst in their days, in the days of old (xliv. 1).
For He established a testimony in Jacob,
And appointed a law in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers,
That they should make them known to their children
(lxxviii. 5).

¹ See the Historical Psalms, lviii., lxxxi., cv., cvi., cxxxv.

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This thought of an inspiring history and a sacred tradition, the support of religion and the stimulus of patriotism, may seem commonplace to us, a something that thoughtful men have always possessed. But it is well to remember that, though a divine gift, it is a plant of slow growth that has been watered by the blood and tears of men. History had to be lived before men could make a theology of it, however simple, and it had to become an inheritance of thought and a possession of faith before it found its way into the songs of the sanctuary. "Providence" to us may be a thin abstraction, unless it is filled with the throbbing life that comes from personal conflicts and historical struggles. But the story of the nations can only become to us a book of God, if we hold in our larger light the truth that was first taught most clearly in the life of this small nation, that there is a thread of divine purpose running through it all.¹

Into the question of their view of their own age we need not now enter with any fulness, as it comes up constantly in the treatment of particular psalms. The great problem was that of retribution, or the relation of God to the piety or wickedness of men. As the belief in a future life had not advanced beyond the dim vision or earnest hope of individual saints, the question of the future was still largely a national one. The people were still haunted by the ancient view that suffering is the punishment of sin and a proof of God's anger, so that the sorrowful and defeated expected to hear the bitter question,

¹ Chap. XI.

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“ Where is now thy God ? ” The righteousness of God meant the vindication of the nation that trusted in Him on the stage of history in this world ; in the past when they had acknowledged their guilt and cried in penitence His mercy had been shown. This thought is repeatedly expressed. It is true that a moral distinction was now drawn between sinners and saints, pious and apostates, within the nation. A purifying judgment within was needed as well as deliverance from external foes ; but, on the whole, it was the nation that was to be redeemed from death and receive a new life. This does not alter the fact that in the psalms there are indications of a deepening of personal piety and a preparation for the richer Christian ideas of sin and sanctity. The national faith is that a community that knows Yahweh and keeps His law will be blessed ; the blessing will be in the form of “ prosperity,” but there is a growing sense that the privileges of knowledge, worship and obedience are themselves a blessing.

The outlook for the future, what is called in technical language “ the eschatology,” need not be discussed here, save to say that it was an extension of this faith in a living Providence to the final outcome of their history. The God who had guided the nation through long, toilsome centuries, and revealed the true worship and abiding law, would bring His work to perfection. We should not expect to find in a collection of short poems the scheme of the future as it is represented in Ezekiel, Joel, Zechariah and Daniel ; the Psalms deal more fully with the past than with the future, but the writers are inspired by

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the same unconquerable hope. Many a time they had to cry

Yahweh, how long shall the wicked,
How long shall the wicked triumph? (xciv. 3.)

But there was comfort in the thought

For Yahweh will not cast off His people,
Neither will He forsake His inheritance,
For judgment shall return unto righteousness,
And all the upright in heart shall follow it (Ps. xciv. 14f.).

A system of thought that is held together by a belief in one God who rules though all the ages, and whose purpose is the building up of a righteous nation to spread His praises in the earth, may well be called a noble theology. The principle that gives it life needs to be applied to our larger world, and after all our subtle discussions concerning the nature of God and man we need to come back in a richer form to the simplicity and strength of this earlier faith.

CHAPTER XI

RELIGION IN HISTORY

WE may take as the motto of this chapter the words " We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, What work Thou didst in their days, in the days of old " (xliv. 1). The psalm from which they are taken is not strictly speaking a historical psalm, though it contains a strong contrast between the present and the past. Whether it comes from the late Persian period or, as most critics think, from the time of the fierce Maccabean struggle, it expresses sharp sorrow on account of national disasters and a passionate appeal for divine help. There is a fierce earnestness in the entreaty and expostulation ; the fact that the land was given to their fathers by Yahweh, and that they could not trust in their own bow and sword for salvation, is surely a promise and pledge of continual help, but now they are cast off and dishonoured. So strong is the conviction that this has happened because of faithfulness and not neglect of the Law that the poet can say on behalf of the nation, " Yea, for Thy sake we are killed all the day." Then follows a passionate appeal that Yahweh will awake and deliver them. " We are counted as sheep for the slaughter." This is different in tone from the usual treatment of history,

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in which the nation is arraigned for its failure to reach the true standard of piety.

Though written in a literary age, the form of these opening words reminds us of a time when history was a matter of family tradition, a thing that was told. The father was the historian, the mother the poet, and the critic was not yet born. The idea of history as we understand it, was one of slow growth; although memory is a natural gift, and we all cherish personal or family recollections, yet the thought of "a movement" linking the generations together by the outworking of a divine purpose can only arise after reflection has had time to play on a long series of facts. This idea then is not created by the psalmists, but is by them applied to the purposes of meditation, prayer and praise. Its origin and growth can be traced in the earlier prophets where it is made the basis of national responsibility (Isa. v.). The Deuteronomic preacher (Deut. viii.) and the great poet of the Exile give it enlargement and beauty, while the stern preacher Ezekiel arraigns the nation before the tribunal of history in a somewhat rigorous fashion. Naturally, this kind of teaching cannot arise at the beginning of a nation's life, it must make history before it can study, criticise and interpret it. In Ps. xcvi. we have an interesting example of an earnest exhortation to hear the living voice of God attached to a liturgical poem by the original author or later adapter; it refers to an incident in the wilderness period, deploring the perverse, contentious spirit of their forefathers, and cries, "To-day O that ye would hear His voice!

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Harden not your heart as at Meribah." (Ex. xvii. ; Numb. xx., Heb. iii. 8 ; Ps. lxxxii. 7). But there are psalms which devote practically their whole strength to this great theme ; cxxxv., one of the liturgical poems or hallelujah psalms, in its summons to worship lays stress upon the fact that it is the God of nature who has chosen Jacob for Himself and Israel for His peculiar treasure ; " He maketh lightnings for the rain, He bringeth forth the wind out of His treasures " ; but by the same power He delivered Israel from Egypt and gave him victory in the early battles ; this leads to a denunciation of idolatry, as something that by its very nature is absurd and futile. Here the historical allusion is only an incident in the general scheme of praise, rendered to the one God of the world at a time when " idols " could be made the subject of sharp ridicule (cf. Isa. xl. 19 ; xli. 7 ; xliv. 10f.).

The most ambitious poem of this kind is Psalm lxxviii., " a rhymed chronicle," which reviews the history of Israel from the earliest times down to the time when Yahweh's rejection of Ephraim and His final choice of Judah were made clear. The writer tells us that he will open his mouth in a parable and utter dark sayings of old, " Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us." History is to be used to tell the praises of Yahweh and to humble the pride of men. The divine teaching had been given for the very purpose of being handed down from generation to generation. The story of God's dealings with their fathers is one of miracle and mercy, met in most cases by man's perversity

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and ingratitude. The poem is based upon the early Hebrew narratives but treats them freely and casts them into a rhetorical form. This kind of treatment of the history in its more fully developed form begins in Deuteronomy. It is evident that this is a Jewish psalm and that the break with Northern Israel belongs to the distant past. As the writer's treatment of this subject is the peculiar feature of the psalm, it has been suggested that this is his parable or riddle. We find in earlier days a different view of Joseph; in Deut. xxxiii. 13f. a rich blessing is bestowed upon Joseph, ending with the prayer that blessing may come upon his head, "and upon the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren." Ezekiel expected that all the ten tribes would return and be established in peace and security. But here we read

Moreover He refused the tent of Joseph,
And chose not the tribe of Ephraim ;
But chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion which He loved ;
And He built His sanctuary like the heights,
Like the earth which He hath established forever (*vv. 67-69*).

The author dwells upon the destruction of Shiloh for the sins of Ephraim, but does not give prominence to the later doom of Jerusalem. History shows the mercy of God as persisting in spite of the faithlessness and folly of His people, but He is finally compelled to reject Joseph and reserve the everlasting mercies for the house of David. It seems natural to find here a beginning of the final division and sectarian bitterness of Jews and Samaritans.

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Psalm cvi. encloses similar reflections within a liturgical framework (cf. Neh. ix. 1; Chron. xvi.). The confession of sin thus offered includes not simply the present generation but passes in review, in a general fashion, the history of the exodus and the conquest of Canaan. Its keynote is

We have sinned with our fathers,
We have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.
Our fathers understood not Thy wonders in Egypt ;
They remembered not the multitude of Thy mercies ;
But were rebellious at the sea, even at the Red Sea.
Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake
That He might make His mighty power be known(*vv.* 6—8).

It is a somewhat conventional recapitulation of the sins and failures of the past, based upon the current theology, that misfortunes are the punishment of sin. We cannot call it an original study; it is an attempt to use accepted facts as the basis of worship. We are told that it is a risky business when history falls into the hands of the preacher, as in that case all historical sense and feeling of reality may be utterly destroyed. The preacher is not the only one who is in danger of being enslaved by conventional formulas, and with the fuller light and larger perspective of our own day we must not undervalue the work of men who began for us the great work of historical interpretation. Some of the wars and tumults of our own time might have been avoided, if men had learned to interpret their own history and that of the world in a nobler spirit, with a clearer perception of the divine laws of truth and justice. Our unbelief may be more subtle, our "idols" may

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be more intellectual, but the truth remains that the failures of the past ought to teach us in our own way to seek the divine revelation written in the great book of history.

Psalm lxxxii. is a shorter, simpler specimen of the liturgical use of exhortation based upon history, following the summons to triumphant worship. There is the same mention of deliverance from trouble of which the redemption from Egypt is a classic example. If Israel would only hearken to God, there would be two clear results ; there would be no worship of strange gods, for who could hear the voice of Yahweh and understand His guidance and then go after foreign idols ? Further, " I should soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries." One thing then is clear, that these teachers of that day had learned to apply the lessons of history as a stimulus towards a nobler creed and purer life. Certainly their knowledge was imperfect, their philosophy exceedingly simple ; they had not gained a clear perspective, they did not understand the action and reaction of subtle processes persisting through long periods. They could not recognise, as we may, that their religion had gained richness and strength through conflict with the customs that they now regarded as superstitious and idolatrous. They at times cherished a narrowness that was inconsistent with the higher elements of their faith and their lofty claims for their God, but some great facts of permanent value they saw clearly. That history has its lessons which need to be reverently pondered ; that the nation has come to

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greatness and individuality because of God's choice and guidance; that great men, as Moses, Samuel and David, played an important part and left a noble inheritance; that national misfortune comes not from blind fate, but often from the stupidity of men who fail to hear the Divine voice; that these great things are to be taught to our children so that they may be fitted for real statesmanship and true service—is there not something in all this that we need to consider in our own day? We may boast of our "culture," our psychology, and yet in the face of real problems be more helpless than men who long ago were by the grace of God crudely groping their way towards a fuller light.

CHAPTER XII

PIETY AND PATRIOTISM

(Ps. cxxxvii.)

THIS psalm is a cry of vengeance against the cruel Babylonians and the unneighbourly Edomites; Yahweh is called to remember the conduct of the children of Edom and requite it in good time, and of Babylon it is said, "Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock." These words send a shudder through our souls, when we pause long enough over them to visualise the picture. It calls up the vision of ancient war, and the terrible scenes that were witnessed when a conquered city surrendered to its foes. This cry for vengeance is natural, when it is not mere stage rhetoric but is wrung from the heart of the vanquished in the hour of defeat and despair. With all our talk of a higher humanity, and Christian chivalry, war when it sweeps across the land carries wanton cruelty and wild devilry in its train. Men still feel that if there is a God in heaven it is right to appeal to Him on behalf of those who have been crushed by brute force. The cry for vengeance in such a case is essentially human; it is hard to make any allowances for cruel national enemies; and yet so complicated is human life that though the Jews suffered often from their

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own folly, they were in a measure justified in crying to heaven to avenge their wrongs. In this confused world innocence and guilt are strangely mingled, and the suffering of the innocent with the guilty gives a sacrificial touch to all national sorrow. The Jews themselves had not reached any lofty stage of sentimental refinement ; to them also war was war, a thing fierce and barbaric though lacking the wholesale power of modern machinery. The notion of conquering cruelty by kindness had not then entered very deeply into the human heart. There were doubtless many of whom it could be said :

“ Yea he loved cursing and it came unto him ;
And he delighted not in blessing, and it was far from him.
He clothed himself also with cursing like as with a garment,
And it came into his inward parts like water,
And like oil into his bones.” (cix. 17, 18.)

This was rendered all the easier when men identified completely their own fortunes with the cause of their God, and could say

And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom,
The reproach, wherewith they have reproached Thee, O Lord.

But this particular psalm, with its sad memories of the great captivity, has something in it even more important than the cry for vengeance, viz., the far reaching question, “ How can we sing Yahweh’s song in a foreign land ? ” and the classic expression of a blended piety and patriotism, “ If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my hand wither ” ; “ If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.” These two are indeed but two aspects of the same thing. The Jew

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was not directly and consciously concerned with enlarging his religion for the use of humanity; the work he did in that direction he did as the instrument of a Providence whose workings he could not understand. He wanted primarily to cling to his own land and enjoy his own religion. When he was flung out into an alien world with no immediate prospect of a return to his sacred city, the question was forced upon him, How can my religion live in a strange atmosphere, in a country that belongs to other gods and is dominated by foreign customs? In those days religion and the country were so closely involved that a change of territory meant in most cases a change of religion. The Jew, however, at this stage felt that he had something that he could not renounce, he could not on the other hand build a small temple in this new land and live on sufferance. Therefore he was thrown back upon himself and compelled to interpret in a larger way his own history, and to make his creed more intellectual. No doubt many individuals failed to do this and were spiritually lost in the confusion, but in the onward movement it is the highest type that counts and not the number of thoughtless individuals. It is still more than five centuries to the time when Jews will be compelled to live without the temple at Jerusalem, when the sanctuary which had become the centre of a widely scattered people will be again desecrated and destroyed, but already the preparation for that time has begun. It was the intense devotion to Jerusalem that would eventually enable men to dispense with Jerusalem, because the city became the centre of a

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literary activity and intellectual development which left as its creation something far more important than any material temple. Not many can visit Jerusalem as pilgrims or tourists, but the book which grew up to glorify the temple has gone out into all the world, and is all the more powerful because it retains such evident marks of the human strife out of which its moving stories and living songs had their birth.

The creative prophetic period of Israel's religion gave the high teaching which constituted the heart of "the revelation." The later thinkers had to solve the problem of the relation of these principles not only to their national life but also to the great outside world. One point was firmly fixed; Jerusalem must remain for the Jew the centre of the world and the supreme sanctuary. Foreigners who felt the attraction of "the city of God" might seek and obtain citizenship by subjection to the Law. That does not carry us much beyond the old tribal situation when each God has his own particular territory. Still it is evident that it would be difficult to keep the larger views of God and religion fastened to a hard, narrow creed. There was no direct conscious missionary propaganda, no society of laymen or priests to spread the truth among the heathen. One glimpse of such a conception we find in the thought of the Servant as Teacher (Isa. xlii. 1-4). Neither was there the view that Hebrew "culture" was to spread itself by the power of the sword. The view that when the nations of the world gather round Jerusalem to attack the city, Yahweh will protect it

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and destroy them, does not amount to "militarism" of that aggressive kind. The victories of Alexander the Great did carry Greek culture into the East. And early in the second century B.C., an attempt was made to force a bastard Greek religion upon the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes the Syrian King. The people who for centuries had been deprived of political life and military power showed that "the saints," when pushed to the wall, can fight for religious freedom. The battles of the Jews against heathenism have been mainly word-pictures that have solaced them in hours of defeat; their real battles have been fought to preserve their existence and maintain their own faith. Facing an angry world, they declared that their God was supreme and their religion the highest. Their victories then must be *supernatural*. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will make mention of the name of Yahweh our God." This was a great faith, that there was more power in the name, character and life of their God than in splendid armies. This reliance upon divine help was sometimes carried to an extreme of which their enemies were not slow to take advantage. But at least it enables us to say that the creed of Judaism did not produce blood-thirsty warriors whose chief aim was to force their religion upon aliens. In the Maccabean as in other crises they fought with fanatical zeal in defence of their own peculiar life.

The fact to be borne in mind is that this problem, "How can our religion live in strange surroundings, torn from its native soil?" was not solved by

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theory alone, but by the hard pressure of life. Living comfortably under the shadow of the temple, the highest lesson—The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise (li. 17)—might not have been so easily learned. When the Jew had discovered that his religion could be kept alive apart from the temple, he had not only found a deeper satisfaction for himself, but prepared the way for the influence that the synagogue was to exercise upon the world. The religion did continue to live in strange lands by meditation, prayer and praise ; by customs that could be carried and books that could be studied. Indeed the kind of literature that we find in the Psalter is the kind that is produced by men who have turned back to the past to learn its lessons, and who have so assimilated the original literature that they can change it into song and prayer. To do this, the Jew had himself to gain a living in whatever ways the world allowed to him ; he did not believe that man could live by bread alone, and even when the struggle for daily bread was fiercest it was noted that with him religion was supreme. Slow, no doubt, he was to learn all that was implied in the proud claim that the God of Israel was the God of the world. The earthen vessel containing the treasure of divine truth was hardened and coarse, so that men counted the zealot as an intolerant enemy of the human race and, even in the light of Christ's teaching, it has taken centuries to reveal what "monotheism" really means. We are still tormented by racial prejudices and tribal barriers

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which mock the claims of a larger humanity. In the Old Testament, however, we have a real beginning in the faith in one law and "one far off divine event to which the whole creation moves."

Three things stand out clear in the earlier form of this faith—one sacred city, Jerusalem; one elect people, Israel; one living God, Yahweh. To the last it seemed to them that Jerusalem was to be the Eternal City for all mankind through the ministry of its people and the influence of its sanctuary. That was the human form in which a great fact of history was enshrined; how else could a Jew regard the order of Providence? If we will abstain from shallow scorn and interpret the fact in the spirit of sympathy that all human life demands, we may find ourselves not unwilling to pay the debt of gratitude. The great religions of the world that look up to One God and Father all claim their descent from Abraham, the Father of the Faithful. In Christianity we have a deeper personal experience, a richer mysticism, but our modern world needs to apply in a larger form the national idea and the social religion of the prophets.

In Babylon the Jews were able to live in communities and cultivate the intellectual and spiritual side of their religion; while men of the ecclesiastical type codified the ritual and law. Individualism had increased and the new communities were Churches in our sense of the word rather than natural societies. But each community was a little Israel and longed to be again incorporated in a larger national unity. In the interpretation of the psalms

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there has been much discussion as to particular poems, whether it is a personal voice or the cry of the suffering Church. Both types actually occur, and probably some personal poems have been adopted to Church use. Israel might mean the community as a whole or the collection of individual Israelites. We are dealing with the work of poets not philosophers. Poetry is much given to personification, and especially oriental poetry. Its imagery is bold and pictures the community as sinning or suffering, weeping or rejoicing. We do not meet with abstract theories of the State, but we have pictures of Israel as a child, a wife, a mother and specially as a servant. The idea of society as an organism is a modern analogy of which we may find a hint in the New Testament (1 Cor. xii.). Old Testament writers had not attacked the subtle problems concerning the structure of society, but they have given us a thought that we still need ; that the nation is a person responsible to God. The crimes of tribes and communities are regarded as sins against God for which punishment will be exacted. Isaiah or Jeremiah could never have adopted the cry of a spurious patriotism, " My country, right or wrong." Those men were so critical of their own country that their patriotism was suspected. The view that the nation is a person above all moral laws they could not have understood, and if they had understood it they would have hated it. To them the triumph of right was more than the survival of the nation. It is the supreme task of religion to bring in the reign of righteousness between the nations.

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To us there is something larger than any nation or empire—that is, God and humanity. Never again for Christian men can piety and patriotism be identical or co-extensive. The greatest trial comes when a man has to criticise his own nation in the name of God and humanity. We must have our home ties, our sacred associations, our beloved sanctuary; historical tradition and bonds of blood are still powerful. But when we remember Jerusalem it is for sorrows endured and services rendered, not as a monopoly or central shrine. It is because the songs of Zion have gone out into the world, and through the centuries gain ever larger meaning, that we turn our eyes not to the east or the west, but upward to that city of God which is the new Jerusalem and the mother of us all. Thus may the dreams of the past be fulfilled and the consciousness of a common brotherhood make wars to cease unto the end of the earth (xlvi. 9), and still the cry of national hatred and fierce revenge.

CHAPTER XIII

POVERTY AND PIETY

THERE was a time when it would have seemed strange to suggest that "economic" considerations have anything to do with a collection of "spiritual songs," but now we have frequent reminders that in the life of Israel, as elsewhere, the religious struggles were influenced by the political circumstances and economic conditions.¹ The problems of social life would be more easily settled if it were not for constant and violent change; in a simple patriarchal state of society, men may all have had a sufficient amount of food and work, and even slavery may not have meant widespread cruelty and wretchedness; but conditions change, the towns grow at the expense of the country, and the distribution of wealth is more unequal. This is seen on a grand scale in the great nations of the world to-day, and in the eighth century before Christ the message of the great prophets is related to these social facts. Those of us who do not believe that "sociology" can completely take the place of theology see clearly that living theologies in their creative periods were not abstract speculations of cloistered students, but

¹ One writer has put this in a somewhat violent form when he says: "Wordsworth's sonnets are no more outside the sphere of economical law, the law of production and distribution, than Worth's fashions or Krupp's guns."

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attempts to solve the whole problem of life and destiny. The pity of the prophets for the poor and their denunciations of the greed and cruelty of the rich were not the wild expressions of political demagogues seeking to set class against class, but intelligent attempts to apply to their own society their ideas concerning the God of Israel and the nature of the community. Not yet was there a fully developed "theocracy" in the later ecclesiastical sense, but it was felt that new conditions had lessened the feeling of brotherhood among the Hebrews, and the man who had no wealth with which to bribe or power with which to coerce was in danger of being driven to the wall. The charge is made against wealthy churchmen in our own day that they rob the poor of a fair share of their earnings, and then preach to them to look to a future heaven as compensation for present poverty. The poor of ancient days had not even that consolation, as their view of the future was vague and their share in "the kingdom of God" was bound up closely with the actual bit of land that gave them a living. If we look at things in the abstract we know that crushing poverty tends to deaden the soul as well as weaken the body, that riches, especially when gained rapidly, lead to luxury and arrogance, and that an even round of comfort may end in shallow contentment and tame conventionality. Hence, while we cannot safely ignore circumstances, we must give the first place to the spirit of the living man. The Old Testament, as part of our Bible, reminds us that, while religion has been kept alive by the hope of the coming Kingdom,

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from the first it has been seeking to bring society under the control of the laws of God. Hence the growing "humanitarianism" of Hebrew legislation and the striking example of "solidarity" given by the Jews as a whole in the face of a hostile world.

We must pass, however, from these general considerations to enquire more closely how it was that in later Judaism "poor" and "pious," "rich" and "wicked," become so nearly synonymous. In the Christian gospel we have the words "blessed are the poor," and in that naked form they seem to need some qualification or explanation. In all ages, since religion gained real spiritual power, it has been recognised that increase of wealth and luxury is a danger to the higher life. In Christian countries many have voluntarily taken vows of poverty, applying to themselves literally the words of the Great Teacher, "Go, sell all thou hast and give it to the poor." Apart from these "counsels of perfection," giving to the poor has been regarded as an essential part of religion, and "charity" has not always been cold. Before the Christian era, almsgiving had become one form of "righteousness." And if it is said that all this is demoralising, breeding patronage and pauperism instead of going to the root of the matter, we may point out that Hebrew teachers and legislators were deeply concerned with the question, "How can the affairs of the nation be so arranged that the fruits of the earth shall be fairly distributed, and men help each other to bear the misfortunes that come through war and famine?" We are concerned here with the theology that lies

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behind this, or with the fact that it is attempting to apply religious belief to "social salvation" by making men feel their brotherhood, limited at first to Israelites, but suggesting a later larger range.

Psalm xli., as it stands in our English version, has enshrined in noble words the thought that the man who is tender and considerate towards the poor and weak will enjoy Yahweh's rich blessing and be repaid in kind. This is of itself a noble message, and has made a lasting impression to that effect.

Blessed is he that considereth the poor ;
Yahweh will deliver him in time of trouble.
Yahweh will preserve him and keep him alive,
And he shall be blessed upon the earth ;
And Thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies.
Yahweh will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing ;
Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.

It has been suggested that the beginning should read

"Happy is he that acteth circumspectly, though weak (and
needy) ;

In the day of evil may Yahweh deliver him," etc.,

but that is not likely to secure general acceptance, though there is certainly a striking contrast between this calm prelude and the bitter complaint that follows. The poet confesses his sin, complains of cruelty and treachery on the part of an intimate friend, but believes that God will give him victory and vengeance. The fierce personal passion has led some expositors to think that the writer spoke in the name of the oppressed and persecuted community, but we must frankly recognise the strong human element even in the noblest poems

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(cf. Chap. XXX). In those days, men did not distinguish so sharply between the community and the individual. At any rate, it was an accepted doctrine that the man is happy who has pity on the poor (Prov. xiv. 21).

One able interpreter of Hebrew religion treats the Psalter under the heading "The Treasure of the Humble" and says, "The righteous poor, oppressed by the unscrupulous rich, here make their voice of protest heard. They characterise themselves as the humble, the contrite, the needy, while the opposition is made up of the proud, the arrogant, the scoffers. The comfort of the believer is the thought that Yahweh will judge the wicked. 'His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the sons of men; He will recompense the righteous, but on the wicked He will rain coals of fire and brimstone' (xi. 4f; cf. xcii. 8). This theory of reward is, therefore, the same that we have met elsewhere and which gave the author of Job such misgivings."¹

It is possible that the word for "the proud" has in some cases been changed, intentionally or accidentally, into a similar word meaning "nations" or "gentiles," at a time when the particular conflicts within the community were forgotten (ix. 17, x. 16). Two words translated "poor" or "afflicted" and "lowly" are similar in form, if not really different forms of the same root; they suggest a close connection between sorrow and humility, humility being one of the prominent and essential features of religion. It was quite natural that the heathen,

¹ Dr. H. P. Smith.

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the outside oppressors, should be proud and arrogant, but the reproach has a slightly different flavour when there is a contrast within the Jewish community itself between those who are poor in worldly goods but strict, devout in their observance of the Law, and those who, through worldly success, have become careless and neglectful of their religious privileges. There is sometimes a similar feeling in modern times for those who have left the simple worship of their father's "chapel" and gone to worship with the brilliant social throng at more "fashionable" sanctuaries. The psalmists are quite convinced that wealth and ostentation do not prevail with God. "He hath not forgotten the cry of the humble." "For the needy shall not be always forgotten; nor the hope of the afflicted disappointed forever." This is the conviction that lies behind the prophetic appeal and the psalmists' prayer, viz., that God hears the cry of the poor, that their misery appeals to heaven, and that, though the waiting may seem long, they shall receive their reward and inherit the land. "This poor man (or afflicted people) cried unto Yahweh, And He delivered him out of all his distresses" (xxxiv. 6). "Because of the oppression of the afflicted, because of the sighing of the poor, Now will I arise, saith Yahweh. I will set him in safety, I will shine forth for him (xii. 5)." Such texts could easily be multiplied to show God's care for the poor. From this it follows that the king as God's representative should manifest the same spirit. "He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy" (lxxxii. 4; Isa. xi. 4).

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Just as in our own day, but in a different form, the claim was made for the poor that they did not want pity or patronage but justice. A prime minister of Egypt in the last generation once said that his country needed two things, justice and water, and favoured the British connection as the best way of getting them. In oriental lands, the lack of steady and just administration has always made the life of the poor burdensome and almost hopeless, and even Christian governments cannot boast of conspicuous success in this sphere. But this spirit of sympathy for the poor is seeking to express itself in political forms in "the living wage," in unions for defence and co-operation against the tyranny of wealth, in pensions for the aged. But it is well to remember how much was accomplished by voluntary effort before these forms of government arose, and also that the most elaborate political organisation cannot dispense with that spirit of sympathy for the unfortunate which was such an essential feature of Hebrew religion. The apostle Paul in one of his great appeals for Christian generosity, enforced his appeal by a quotation from the Psalms, from a fine description of the righteous man, the man that feareth Yahweh:

He hath scattered abroad, he hath given to the poor,
His righteousness abideth forever (cxii. 9 ; 2 Cor. ix. 9).

In our own day, these appeals come in many forms, not simply as with the psalmist and Paul for those of our own blood and faith, but also for the needy and oppressed in many lands. To succour the innocent victims of famine and war is still one of the

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most effective expressions of the religious spirit. Here we learn that it is the spirit of God, that it should be the policy of the king, and it is a mark of the righteous man. That these ideas may have been abused or misinterpreted does not lessen their value or cancel the beneficent power they have exerted in the history of the world. It is still broadly true that a great deal of simple piety is found in the homes of the poor, and that sudden increase of wealth is a severe strain upon the piety of Jew or Gentile. Almsgiving may have become formal and poverty may have its pride, but there is something noble in the poor Jew clinging to religion, studying the Book, and facing the arrogant rich with the feeling that "the treasure of the humble" is greater than the wealth of princes. It is true that economic conditions help to create ideas, but it is also true that ideas have a realm of their own, and continue to exercise a powerful influence, even when their origin is forgotten.

♦

CHAPTER XIV

PIETY AND POLEMICS

MAN is certainly a fighting animal, the greatest things that he possesses have been won by hard toil from nature or wrested through fierce conflict from his fellow men. In ancient days religion or superstition entered into everything, and for the earnest man life was a continual conflict with mischievous gods or wicked men. Hence we are not to look to ancient prophecy and religious song for a culture in which all passion has been suppressed, in which piety and patriotism, having gained elegance of form, have become thin and bloodless. If we come with such expectation, when we meet fierce biting expressions of this kind, we are disappointed.

The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance ;
He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked ;
So that men shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous,
Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth (lviii. 10).

From the point of view of our present discussion, it is not necessary to debate the question whether this is an early psalm denouncing wicked rulers in Israel, and this particular verse a gloss of the Maccabean age expressing vengeful feelings against foreign rulers, or whether the whole psalm is late and a cry against Babylonian, Persian or Syrian oppressors. The fact is that the writer, speaking in the name of

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religion and justice, not only claims that the downfall of the wicked oppressors will prove that there is a God that judgeth the earth, and that the righteous do not fail of their reward, but also that the essence of this reward is a fierce joy of the pious in the sufferings of the wicked, expressed in the repulsive figure washing their feet in the blood of the wicked. The whole psalm is certainly "spirited and powerful"; with grim earnestness and striking figures it pictures the evil nature and cruel conduct of unjust rulers, and when we read it as an indictment of oppressors and a cry to heaven for justice it appeals to our sympathy. But we, with our loathing of fierce battles and ruthless slaughter, are repelled by this "blood-bath" in a religious poem. Unfortunately, in our own time, we have heard of "hymns of hate," but in theory at least we had come to the belief that love is the real conquering power, and that we should at least make an effort to understand and love our enemies. And that which shocks us is the rude contrast between these "cursing psalms" and the Christian ideal. We have, however, to face the fact that in the Old Testament we often meet, not with the distilled and refined essence of Christian sentiment, but with "raw" human nature in its struggles towards a clearer vision of brotherhood and humanity. Our business is not to apologise for this or to explain it away, but to understand it, and so realise the slow, painful progress of truth and righteousness. We can easily understand the cry for vengeance in Ps. cxxxvii., when a people had been crushed by the violence of war, had seen their

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loved ones fall by the sword or drop dead on the road to captivity, at a time when divine justice was conceived as an exact reprisal, the law of like, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But when in prayers that have now become detached from circumstances we meet men clamouring for revenge upon their opponents, the human element disturbs us more.

Let his days be few ;
And let another take his office.
Let his children be fatherless,
And his wife a widow.
Let his children be vagabonds, and beg ;
And let them seek their bread out of their desolate places.
Let the extortioner catch all that he hath ;
And let strangers make spoil of his labour.
Let there be none to extend mercy to him ;
Neither let there be any to have mercy on his fatherless
children.
Let his posterity be cut off ;
In one generation let his name be blotted out.¹
Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered. (cix. 8ff.)

If we met this anywhere but in the Bible, we should say that the man was in a towering passion and that it reminded us of excommunication with bell, book and candle. It has been well said, "The strange thing, too, is that sometimes the wild longing for vengeance flashes out from the tenderest hearts (cf. xli. ; cxi. 9-11 ; cxliii. 12 ; cxxxvii. 7-9). It has been hard to see what place such themes can have in a literature of revelation, and many have been the devices to explain away the

¹ So the Greek Version.

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seeming offence.”¹ After all, “the strange thing” is the strangeness of our common human nature and the complexity of human life. It may seem a hard saying, but it is better that these things are in our Bible than that they should have been left out. In other words, the Bible as a revelation of God would have been less perfect if it had been possible for it by some artificial or supernatural process to cast off all imperfections. We have no right to demand that a Jeremiah shall stand on the same level as Jesus or that Job shall speak the language of Paul. We are by this time convinced that a revelation that comes to us in historical forms, and shows the slow upward movement of humanity through the pressure of the divine spirit is the only form suitable to a full manifestation of the wisdom and love of God. A book of dogmas or a selection of visions would be poor compared with this rich, complex material. It may be said that it were better for men to be silent than utter these wild and wandering cries (Ps. xxxix. 1, 2; Job xl. 4, 5).

Let their table before them become a snare ;
And when they are in peace let it become a trap.
Let their eyes be darkened that they see not ;
And make their loins continually to shake.
Pour out Thine indignation upon them,
And let the fierceness of Thine anger overtake them,
Let their habitation be desolate ;
Let none dwell in their tents (lxix. 22 f.)—

the climax of this mighty curse being “Let them be blotted out of the book of life, and not

¹ Prof. McFadyen's “Messages of the Psalmists,” p. 175.

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be written with the righteous." We may safely say that only those who have lived through fierce persecution and dreadful war can really understand such utterances. The association of wife and children in the doom of the man upon whom the curse of God is invoked is a survival of ancient times when responsibility for the individual's action was shared by those of the same blood. It is a fact of life that those bound together by the ties of nature do suffer together, but our modern sense of justice seeks to separate the real offender, that he may bear his own punishment. If we accept the possibility that in some instances we have signs of division and strife within the Jewish community, is it not also a fact that internal quarrels are often the most bitter and lasting? The quarrels over religion have in all ages been the sharpest, and the language of "Christian" polemics has often been bitter and brutal. It is not merely that men lose control of their temper in hours of excitement, but also that they have conceived themselves to be fighting for eternal truth, and to deviate by a hair's breadth was to imperil their salvation. One wishes that there might have been less coarseness and violence, but we have to admit that there have been times when precious things were preserved by this intense devotion and concentrated passion. We to-day are apt to smile in a patronising, contemptuous fashion at this frantic earnestness when our calm indifference is perhaps more contemptible. True Christian culture should combine calmness of speech with strength of conviction, but a passionate

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devotion to our own faith with a genuine toleration is a difficult combination. Besides, there are moments when a flaming indignation against wrong and a withering denunciation of evil are a religious duty. We do not maintain that these hard-pressed, persecuted men had reached the Christian standard, but it is not from our perfection, personal or national, that we can condemn them.

This is one place where we find "the humanism" of the Bible standing out in bold relief. The shock may do us good if it leads us to think and reminds us that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels." It is evidently the will of God that life should express itself freely, so that we have in the divine book the passionate, volcanic outbursts of Job, the restless scepticism of Ecclesiastes, not to mention the narrow nationalism of Esther. If these things had been prematurely stifled and cast aside, it would have been an unreal picture that would have been left. When the worst comes out, even the man himself may see it in a higher light and reduce it to some reasonable proportions. We learn here the limitations of good men, no one man or party could monopolise within itself the full all-round view of religion and the world, and yet such strong language was only possible for those who completely identified God with their own views and their own cause. Something has to be forgiven to intensity of conviction when it is seen how much harm has been done by a shallow worldliness and cold indifference. The Jews were often narrow, turbulent, dominated by a spirit of faction, but, few in number as they

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were, they have done more for liberty and religion than the countless millions of the Orient who were passive and helpless, the slaves of custom or the victims of tyranny. The Jew refused to be crushed; he cursed the priests and rulers who were, in his view, traitors to the law of God. Harsh, unlovely features were developed in those hours of bitter strife, but out of it there came a form of life and a type of character that had a part to play in the world. When we have banished national hatred and cleared away sectarian strife without losing our individuality or lessening our hold upon eternal truths, we shall have come nearer to the solution of the great problem of life with which men in all ages have wrestled, and it will not then be in any supercilious tone that we shall speak of men who, out of their distress and agony, cursed the wicked and cried to God for vengeance.

CHAPTER XV

THE HYMN OF CREATION

(Psalm civ.)

THERE are many references to the work of creation in the Psalms, but this is the most elaborate and significant treatment of that great subject. Elsewhere we are told that "the heavens declare the glory of God" (xix. 1), that "it is He that hath made us and His we are" (c. 3); allusions to creation furnish motives for worship (xcv.), or serve as an introduction to the liturgical treatment of Israel's history (cxxxvi.); the hosts of heaven and the powers of nature are called to praise Yahweh because "He commanded and they were created" (cxlviii.); but here the presentation, while poetic in spirit, is more systematic in form, and demands careful consideration. A study of the course of thought and the expressions used will help us to appreciate the beauty of this simple poetry, and also help to make clear the relation of this great nature psalm to the earlier views of the same subject. It will not be advisable to entangle ourselves in technical discussions regarding metres and strophes, but some notes on the structure of the poem are necessary. Such subordinate questions as whether the opening and closing sentences are liturgical additions need not detain us; the words

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at the beginning, " Bless Yahweh, O my soul," are quite appropriate, especially if it is from the same hand as the preceding psalm. There the theme is Yahweh's patience, kindness, and forgiving mercy ; here it is the majesty and power of the same living God. The same phrase at the end may be an addition and the " Hallelujah " may be the heading of the next psalm. One commentator manages to arrange the poem in seven strophes of eight lines each. But this he has achieved by the omission in ten cases of a clause or verse, and while one admires the symmetrical character of the result, we feel that such drastic paring and trimming is a great weight to place upon a theory of strophe which is itself uncertain. One could imagine an author setting himself to put into verse a storm of creation in seven strophes corresponding to the seven days of Genesis i., beginning with the creation of light and closing with a glorification of the Sabbath, but our poet is not a literary slave of that type (cf. Ps. cxix).

Who maketh the clouds His chariot,
He goeth about on the wings of the wind.

This is a good couplet, and there does not seem to be any real need to dispense with it on the ground that a glossator was thinking of Ps. xviii. 11 :—

And He rode upon a cherub and did fly ;
Yea, He flew swiftly upon the wings of the wind.

But there does seem to be a difficulty in *v.* 8. Speaking of " the waters " that " stood above the mountains," the poet says :

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At Thy rebuke they fled,
At the sound of Thy thunder they hasted away ;
They went up by the mountains,
They went down by the valleys
Unto the place which Thou hast founded for them.
A boundary Thou hast set which they may not pass,
That they may not again cover the earth.

In *v.* 8, as it stands in our version, the waters rush up to the mountains and rush down to the valleys to the place appointed for them. There are various remedies, the most drastic being to omit *v.* 8 as a reminiscence of a feature in the description of a storm, "they mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths" (cvii. 26). Then we have the following suggestions : (1) *v.* 8 is a parenthesis which says that when the waters fled, the mountains came up and the valleys went down to the place appointed for them ; (2) to treat only the first half of the verse in this manner—then it is the waters that go to the place for them ; (3) to drop the word "went down" as a scribe's mistake—then the meaning is that the mountains and the valleys appear from the receding water. This last appears to be the simplest, if the verse is retained. It is fortunate, however, that in reading or hearing such a poem the general impression makes itself felt in spite of such ambiguities.

It has been suggested that *vv.* 16, 17, should come after *v.* 12, and 13-15 after 18 ; this would bring together the references to the mountains and forests with their inhabitants, but we cannot be sure that the Hebrew poet was so much bound by the idea of logical order. What is meant in *v.* 13 by "The

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earth is satisfied with the fruit of Thy works " ? An easy change would give us the thought that from " the clouds " (or outburst of water) the earth might be satisfied, which would be more specific and make a better parallelism. To leave out the well known phrases, " and wine which gladdeneth man's heart," " and bread which strengtheneth the heart of man " (*v.* 15), would lessen the poetic power and beauty of the passage. " The cedars of Lebanon which He hath planted " (*v.* 16) seems to be a natural parallel to the line, " The trees of Yahweh are satisfied," and not merely a glossator's correct interpretation of it. We need not discuss the statement that the lines,

Thou makest darkness, and it is night,
Wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth,

is a " prosaic " repetition of the previous verse and a general introduction to the next ; nor attempt to prove that a psalm-writer might share the spirit of the Wisdom Literature and cry, in the midst of his meditation,

O Yahweh, how manifold are Thy works, Thy wonders,
In wisdom hast Thou made them all.

But the phrase " There go the ships " certainly raises a question. To a scribe the mention of the sea might suggest ships, but their position here in the story of creation is strange and the parallelism requires something different. Perhaps the original was " There go the great sea-monsters " and in the next line " leviathan " is mentioned as belonging to this type (cf. Gen. i. 21, " and God created the great sea-monsters "). The thought that Yahweh created

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this great sea-monster in order to have sport with it Himself seems childish and not to be expected at this stage. "This monster, too huge for man, is to God a dear little animal to sport with." As it is possible to translate "play in it," i.e., in the sea, we may avoid the grotesque suggestion of the rendering that many have accepted. Note the reference to the mountains. "Where all the beasts of the field do play" (Job xl. 20. The Greek text here offers "created for the angels to play with").

Leaving the question of translation we may remark that the appearance of "leviathan" in this place leads us to reflect upon the absence, on the whole, of the mythological element in this collection of poems. A glance at the Psalter will be sufficient to show that we are far removed, both from a primitive poetry which is actually mythological or which is still saturated with the allusions and figures natural to such a stage, and, on the other hand, from a highly cultivated and artificial literature which uses such allusions as conscious metaphors or mere literary ornaments. There is a soberness and simplicity about this poetry which rests upon the fact that after centuries of struggle the "heathenish" elements in life and literature have been subdued and regulated and are now completely subject to Jewish theology. This also is a matter of "development," though we know that no living movement proceeds along a straight fixed line. The narrative in Gen. ii., iii. is rich in such mythological allusions, and there we feel they are nearer their native atmosphere, though penetrated by a higher spirit. The writer did not

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use them in any conscious mechanical manner; they belonged to his world and were fit symbols of his high teaching. Behind the stately programme of Gen. i. the line of an earlier cosmogony may be discerned, but it is dominated by an advanced creed and systematic theology. Poets by their nature are "very bold" and use such material with the feeling that all things belong to God; hence in Ezekiel and Job imagery from this source is more abundant (Job xxxviii. and such passages as iii. 8; vii. 12; Ezek. xxviii. 11ff; xxxi. 18; xxxix). Turning to the psalms, it is possible that there is such a reference in viii. 1, 2; and it has been conjectured that part of xix. was originally a hymn to the sun-god worshipped in Babylon (Ezek. viii. 16), and that this was later adapted to Jewish worship. If Israel's God is Lord of the world, then all gods may be stripped in His honour. But in the psalms there is little left of this primitive, luxuriant growth; words or phrases discovered here and there by the diligent student are simply parts of a traditional vocabulary, and do not commit the author any more than our use of the word "lunatic" involves a belief in a connection between madness and the moon.

Let the glory of Yahweh endure for ever,
Let Yahweh be glad in His works,

seems a strange form of speech, as if the writer expressed the wish that the verdict given in Gen. i. might be found everlastingly true. It is, however, possible that the slight change from the direct

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statement, "Yahweh's glory shall endure," etc., to the present form may have taken place after the poem left the hand of the original writer.

He looketh on the earth and it trembleth ;
He toucheth the mountains and they smoke.

(civ. 32 ; Amos ix. 5.)

This couplet is difficult to fit into the connection ; it would be more at home in such manifestations of the divine presence as are described in Ps. l. and lxxvii. ; it is scarcely a sign of Yahweh rejoicing in His works, and to make it an expression of the fact that creation, which was originally good, has lost its perfect harmony through God's anger against sin seems too subtle and far-fetched for a poem of this kind.

The final question that awaits us is, Does the poem really end with the words,

May my meditation be pleasant to Him,
But I will rejoice in Yahweh,

and must we say that " a Maccabean editor is not satisfied until he can add an imprecation " ?—as if it was the business of Maccabean editors to add imprecations to the milder utterances of earlier days. Or the question may be put in this way, Was this thing that strikes us as " a discord " a quite natural contrast to the Jew of that time ? In Psalm cxxxix. we find an even stronger expression of intolerance towards " sinners " by one who is a keen student and an advanced theologian, but there also it is possible to find " the Maccabean temper," only we must remember that this temper

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is not confined to any age. At one time, the sinners were "the heathen," the external foes, and later when it was seen that Jews themselves could be the greatest hindrance to a strict life and pure worship, the conflict became more personal and bitter. When "the saint" meditated on the wonders of Yahweh's vision, the great traditions of history, the glory of the temple, the perfection of the Law, he remembered that there were men not far away, men of the same blood and speech, who were careless as to these things, and who merited the indignation of the patriot and the anger of God. Thus we have been reminded that in Psalm xxiii. which speaks to us only of God's gracious goodness and gentle guidance the phrase, "in the presence of mine enemies," once had its real setting in the harsh contrasts of human life.

When we have cleared away these introductory questions in a manner more or less satisfactory to ourselves, the way is open to consider the main theme of the poem, and we have learned incidentally what a variety of questions may be raised by critical study of one page of this ancient literature. To many it may seem mere perversity or waste of time to wrestle with these small problems instead, as they say, of simply enjoying the poetry as it stands. The words of Clough seem appropriate :

Away, haunt thou not me,
Thou vain Philosophy !
Little hast thou bestead,
Save to perplex the head,
And leave the spirit dead.

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Unto thy broken cisterns wherefore go,
While from the secret treasure-depths below,
Fed by the skyey shower
And clouds that sink and rest on hill-tops high,
Wisdom at once and Power
Are welling, bubbling forth unseen, incessantly ?
Why labour at the dull mechanic oar
When the fresh breeze is blowing,
And the strong current flowing,
Right onward to the eternal shore ?

This is a natural feeling when one has been in a dissecting room of any kind ; there is a sense of being stifled by brutal details and a longing for the free, fresh air. But, surely, we may have a fuller enjoyment of the living form, the beauty of the flower, the charm of the poem, when there has been a study of the inner mechanism. The complete divorce of the scientific and artistic sense is not absolutely necessary. The student, like our poet, may pass from childlike wonder to the more intelligent appreciation expressed in the cry, " O Yahweh, how manifold are Thy works, Thy wonders ! In wisdom hast Thou made them all."

It has long been accepted by scholars that the writer of this poem bases his work on the first creation narrative (Gen. i.) and refers also to the second story (cf. *v.* 29 with Gen. ii. 7 ; iii. 19) but what he gives us is not a mechanical repetition or copy. As poetry his work does not attain to the level of strength and beauty found in Isa. xl. or Job xxxviii. The authors of those poems are stronger men, capable of more sustained effort, but our poet has rendered a real service in his hymn of creation. He is not con-

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cerned with scientific investigation but with devout worship ; we, however, are led to reflect that the sober monotheistic view of the world, which has now become an essential feature of Israel's religious thought, prepared the way for later science by bringing the thought that the world is an expression of law and unity. It only provoked controversy and produced bitterness when, in later days, an attempt was made to give authority and finality to the Jewish forms. The poet will sing the glory of Yahweh as shown in creation and in the present order of nature. The poets think of nature as a living movement and creation as a present and plastic process ; they probably thought of it as having a beginning, but they did not picture it as fixed and finished in a cold mechanical sense. The colours of the picture naturally have reminiscences of creation stories that played their part in the world long before Israel existed as a nation. But at this time these colours are somewhat faded, we cannot be sure that the writer was conscious of the long history that lay behind them. There was a time when Israelites deliberately claimed for Yahweh powers and victories earlier ascribed to Marduk, the Babylonian god of light ; but that battle has been long fought and won, now there is only one God and other gods are inferior beings or vain idols.

God, the majestic ruler, clothes himself with light as with a royal garment (cf. Job. xl. 10 ; and the more fully developed description, 1 Tim. vi. 16). He stretches out the heaven as a tent-curtain (Isa. xl. 22) and in the waters above He lays the

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beams of His upper chamber ; from there He can visit men, for He can make the clouds His chariots and use the winds and the lightning as His messengers. As for the lower waters that cover the earth, He regulates them, that they may have a place of their own. In those days there was no great conception such as we have of the ocean and tides in their ceaseless flow changing in many ways the configuration of the earth. The primitive thought was that the roaring floods were a great monster that had to be conquered and curbed. Here is the suggestion of a law established by one God for the peace of mankind and the safety of the earth. Of the constant circulation through evaporation, rains and springs the poet has no sense, but he knows that God gives the springs, because He cares for the creatures that He has made.

He causeth grass to grow for the cattle,
And herb for the service of man.

Now there are many trees that men have planted for which they have to care, but there are also the great forest trees that are " trees of Yahweh " in the fullest sense because He planted them. The sun and moon are no longer gods, but creatures of Yahweh and servants of man to regulate his labour and constitute his calendar. One of the greatest divisions is that between day and night. Our civilisation and artificial light almost abolish this, in the cities at least, but the simple life of the peasant in places not yet completely clear of wild animals is here described. Night is the time when man must seek

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shelter, security, sleep, and then "the beasts of the forest creep forth" in the night; if one should be restless, the roar of the young lion may be heard "seeking his meat from God." But in the morning the sun shines and man feels the call of nature, and is invited into the open air; he goes forth to his work and to his labour until the evening. A simple life this of daily toil and nightly rest; no hint of the complexities and complications of our modern way of living. There are no abstract praises of nature or solitude, no artificial worship of simplicity, only a rich, warm feeling of communion with nature and God, a sense of sharing with trees, birds, and animals in the great common provision that has been made for "man and beast." The life and health of all living creatures is daily dependent on this great God who dwells in His great palace above the firmament; but He is a wise and generous Lord, He gives to all their meat in due season. It is a great delight to the poet to meditate on this high theme, and because of his noble faith and genuine feeling he can quicken in others the spirit of devotion. This is one of the great contributions that the Old Testament has made to the religious life of the world; it conquered the sensual nature-worship of those days and gave, not a mere artistic appreciation of natural beauty, but a sense of the presence of God in the open-air world of seas and springs, forest and field.

CHAPTER XVI

MAN'S PLACE IN NATURE

(Psalm viii.)

THIS is a brief and beautiful well-balanced poem treating a subject of supreme importance—the position of man in the world of nature. Men handle the same theme to-day in philosophy and poetry. All the great thinkers of the world have wrestled with it; the terms change, the world grows but the substance of the problem remains the same. The philosopher tells us that man's thought creates the world; though the fabric of the world continues the same in a sense, each man must in some sense create his own world; in other words, things outside of us are nothing until they become thoughts within us. The Hebrew thinker had not reached that stage of speculation, and hence there is not such a great division between his philosophy and his poetry. But this short poem shows that the Hebrew religion has passed through many conflicts and reached a lofty height. There is no struggle or movement in the poem itself, simply a calm appropriation and presentment of the highest thought of the time. Neither is it mechanical repetition or copying; there is real feeling and fine poetic power. But what we mean is that generations of noble men have had to

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wrestle with the problems of thought and life before this short poem could come into being.

The poet desires to sing in the spirit of thankfulness and humility God's glory in the heavens. At the beginning we meet a difficulty—the only important one in the psalm; the words of introduction and conclusion express clearly the main theme, the supreme glory of Yahweh's name in all the earth, but what is the connection and meaning of the phrase, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou dost establish strength" (Greek translation has *praise* for *strength*). We can understand the application of the text in its Greek form by our Lord in Matthew xxi. 16; in that sense the faith of children may put to shame the scepticism of the mighty. But what does it mean here in the accepted translation? That Yahweh makes the weak and helpless a bulwark against His enemies, even if we can ascribe such a bold statement to the poet, seems to come in strangely at this point. That he refers to children as just beginning to speak because in this respect they are superior to all other creatures seems to be an artificial interpretation. The suggestion that without any change of consonants, the sentence may be translated as follows seems to be a very happy one.

Let me sing Thy glory in the heavens,
 With the mouth of babes and sucklings !
Thou hast established a fortress on account of Thine
 opponents,
 To restrain the enemy and the rebel.

Here we have a desire for simplicity and humility on the part of the poet and a reference to the ancient

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story of creation which represented the God of light as conquering the powers of darkness and chaos and setting permanent limits to their malign power. Afterwards the poem moves on to express the wonders of creation and to marvel that God, capable of such wonderful works, should reserve for mortal man a place of subordination and service and yet of kingly rule in the varied order of this world. Probably the next lines should read :

When I behold the work of Thy fingers,
The moon and stars which Thou hast prepared,
What is man that Thou shouldst be mindful of him ?
Or the son of man that Thou shouldst visit him ?

In contrast with these heavenly lights, so majestic as they rule the night, man seems small, microscopic. There is no complaint here, simply calm submission to God's decree and scarcely a crushing sense of littleness, as immediately a great place is claimed for man within his own sphere. There is a striking contrast in the way in which a similar thought is used in Job vii. 17 ff. Sober scholars have thought that the great poet in the bitterness of his soul "parodies" the words of our psalm, but it may be Job is earlier and that here there is remembrance of his sharp question.

In gratitude it is noted that God has reserved a high place in the scheme of things for frail man, given to him royal qualities, assigned to him a relatively dignified position, in fact "crowned" him with glory and honour. Thus the poet gives his own answer to the question, "What is man?"

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It will scarcely meet the case to present to the English reader the sentence "Thou hast made him a little lower than the *Elohim*," as that leaves the problem of translation unsolved. To say that man is a little short of *the divine*, or divinity, is to enter into an abstract realm that the thinkers of that day had not reached. With all respect to the Revised Version, "God" does not seem to be the most satisfactory translation, as at this period "God" to the poet meant Yahweh, the God of Israel, who is now the God of the world and far above all human and divine beings. So that on the whole we prefer the old translation "angels" as reproducing most clearly the thought and spirit of the original. In the earliest days the world of men's thought was full of "gods," among whom superiority was claimed for Yahweh. "He is a great King above all gods;" if there are any other gods they are subordinate to Him, His servants and ministers. Man, then, is the head and lord of this visible world, and is not far below the dwellers in the higher world. So we come to the thought of an ordered world of things and living beings who are all subject to the one supreme God. This is a great contribution to the interpretation of the world, a noble "world conception"; it has been enlarged by the growth of science and the power of human thought, but to the man of faith it is essentially true.

We believe that this is "a revelation" but not one sent suddenly and arbitrarily from above, but growing through many centuries as the result of man's search for God and God's guidance of man. There

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was a time of division and confusion in man's thought, when many gods struggled for the mastery; there was a time also when the true God, the God of righteousness, had only a limited sphere. In those earlier days sun, moon and stars were gods, and had their worshippers and their spheres of control in human life; now they are creatures of the one God and servants of man (Gen. i. 16; Isa. xl. 26). Struggles with foreign gods, prophetic teaching as to the power and manner of creation, all these religious processes must go on for centuries and produce a stage of culture, a deposit of doctrine which has entered into the soul of this poet and become part of himself, before he could produce this noble hymn for the service of his Church. He is not a theologian, but a poet giving beauty and music to an accepted creed; he is the heir of a great past. He does not create something out of nothing; rather he shows his originality by compressing into a few simple words that the world will not willingly let die, the highest achievement of his people. It is well for us to remember how much of toil and thought there lies behind a "simple gospel."

The psalm cannot in any strict sense be called "Messianic"—the writer speaks of "man" or "humanity," not of the Christ; he is not concerned with views about personal destiny or national hopes; at a time of peace and in an attitude of calm faith he gives a picture of the world order. Great men in later times not only sang this sacred song, they meditated on its meaning and used its suggestive phrases in other and larger connections.

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The Apostle Paul in his treatment of the great sayings of the Old Testament is free and bold. When he mentions the fact that the enemies of the Messiah are to be put under His feet (Ps. cx. 1), he mentions a great enemy, death, that was certainly not in the mind of the original writer, and then in the sweep of his great argument he treats our present passage as prophetic "But when he saith, All things are put in subjection, it is evident that He is excepted who did subject all things unto Him." (1 Cor. xv. 26 ff.; cf. Eph. i. 22.). The future supremacy of God, when the redemptive programme of the Son is complete, is certainly a subject that never entered into the mind of our poet. But here is certainly a great truth, whether we view it in connection with Paul's eschatology or not, that man's dominion over nature is not a fixed, completed thing. Another Christian teacher (Heb. ii. 5 f.) quotes the central part of the psalm, laying stress upon its assertion that "Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet" and tells us that the ideal is not yet fulfilled. "But now we see not yet all things subjected to him. But we behold Him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man." Our Lord Jesus to this writer is the ideal man, and what is spoken of man can be applied to Him who represents humanity in its most sacred struggle and supreme achievement. Another example this, of the fact that the view of man and the world changes as human life advances

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to higher stages. It is by a study of literature that fixes the poem in its own setting and comprehends its roots in the past, and its suggestions for the future, that we mark the progress that is both slow and real. We can never go back to a simpler past, we must preserve its highest spirit ; and we can only do this by expressing it in a form of our own. In what manner the Christ as Leader and Saviour is made perfect through suffering, and what is the relation of this suffering to His dominion over the world, is not for us to discuss here, but such questions certainly lift the psalm out of its quiet antique atmosphere into regions of theology which became more complex when the stimulus of Greek philosophy had given to the Hebrew mind something of its own subtlety. "Man's place in nature"—what an immense and difficult subject this has become to those of us who have lived through many of the complicated discussions of the latter half of the nineteenth century! Such words as "evolution," "heredity," "environment," came to have new and deeper meaning, came to be catchwords and watchwords, came to make us feel that we were caught in the meshes of a wonderful mechanism, physical and intellectual. What is "nature"—do you include man in it, or does he stand apart in some sense far from it and rule it, or is he merely a conscious cog in an infinite network of blind machinery? To mention these questions is to show how far we have moved from the intellectual point of view of the psalmist—from a time when the world was limited to the earth with the waters below and the heavens above, when

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the world that a man ruled was a farm or a small community of his fellow men. Our conception of the greatness of the world and the wonderful life of humanity has grown, and in some of our moods this seems merely to emphasise the smallness of the individual man. The acreage of knowledge is enlarged, the dominion of man over nature increased ; but what is a man, even a great man, in the face of the unceasing world-movement ? The size of things oppresses us now, the scale on which individual men are sacrificed in industry and war terrifies us ; the " civilisation " that man has made sometimes seems more cruel than the primitive struggle under simpler conditions, and the question torments us, Can we maintain the simple faith in the more complex modern world ? If we can find ourselves in the presence of God and nature in the mood of this ancient saint, then we may again ask his question, " What is man ? " and find substantially the same answer that the world is good and that " frail man " has a place in it where he can show his royalty of soul. If we are capable more and more of realising the grandeur of the world and of appreciating the teaching of a long line of poets and saints, then we may cherish the hope that we were not made to die, that even the songs composed for the earthly temple, and limited in their range to the present order, are but a preparation for that new Jerusalem which shall abide for evermore.

CHAPTER XVII

A GREAT PRINCIPLE

“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.”—Ps. cxxvi.

THIS is one of the shortest but also one of the sweetest and strongest of these sacred songs ; it stands the test of literary criticism as a perfect little poem, and it claims an interpretation that is larger than any local harvest. When in a critical commentary we read a still shorter summary of this short poem in the words, “an assertion of the festive joy of the people when Yahweh restores their prosperity ; preparatory to the prayer that He may grant abundant harvests,” we feel that we have received a chill, just as if we had “summarised” a frail, beautiful flower by compressing it into a clenched fist.¹ Fortunately the flower still lives, the poem is still there. This is a poem, not a dogmatic statement ; while the music is pure and the general sense quite evident, there is uncertainty as to any exact historical relationship. Yet we feel that whether it refers wholly or only in part to the future, the visions of bright days to come are naturally based upon the memories of past deliverances.

¹ This is what happens to poetic visions when we reduce them to mere definitions.

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We have a very good illustration in Ps. lxxxv of the way in which faith uses the three sides of life, past deliverance, present desire, and future hope. There also the prosperity of the land, the fruitfulness of the soil, is the natural symbol of larger blessings. In that case also we are not absolutely certain of the time and nature of the national redemption, but the principle is clear. In that Psalm, as elsewhere in the Old Testament, we are not concerned with abstract principles. We are always close to the soil and in real contact with life. God in history means God at work in the experience of the believer and in the fortunes of the nation. There is the attitude of faith, the forward look, the clear conviction that no great blessing of the past completes the divine programme but is merely a pledge and symbol of the greater day still to come. The poet declares that in the past Yahweh has shown His power to redeem and His willingness to pardon: "Thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob, Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of Thy people." The divine mercy has not had its full effect because sin and faithlessness still cling to God's people; therefore the burden of his prayer rings out in the earnest cry, "Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause Thine indignation toward us to cease." The answer comes to him in the hour of meditation and submission: God's message to a prepared people will be one of peace. When the Lord gives that which is good, "our land shall yield her increase." But earth is linked with heaven and hence this glorious harvest, "Truth springeth out of the earth,

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and righteousness hath looked down from heaven." It is perhaps in the light of the fuller statement (lxxxv.) that we should study this short suggestive song.

Such a song refuses to be bound down to any small depressing view of life; even if the circumstances of that poet are still touched with sadness, his soul catches a glimpse of the heavenly light. If we suppose him to say that the first glory of the earliest deliverance soon faded like the splendour of a passing dream and left men face to face with hard prosaic reality, he can still pray for a turn of destiny which will have a larger significance and a more permanent power. Or if we find an expression of the fact that when God's deliverance breaks in upon our sorrow, there is an element of glad surprise bringing a feeling that it is too good to be true, too fair to last (Luke xxiv. 11), we have in another form the poetic vision of faith. The poem, like a parable, has a certain advantage in its dimness of outline, a sweet suggestiveness which makes it fit so easily into our larger world and richer experience. We cannot rise to the height of this noble song when in an ordinary prosaic mood, for the man who wrote it was, if not in a state of rapture, at least in a mood of conquest. If the clouds were not cleared away, he had strength of vision to see through them, and to believe in the brightness beyond. This is no shallow optimism; the presence of life's sorrow and uncertainty is keenly felt, but there is what we in our modern language call faith in "an ordered world" in which toil and sacrifice

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may pass through depression but need not end in despair. There is not yet the full significance of the great saying, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," or the specific emphasis of the words, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," but we are moving towards these high planes of thought, when men are coming to realise that the sweetest songs come out of sorrow, that the greatest gifts to humanity come through the cross. Men wrestle with this dark problem, sometimes in sullen submission, sometimes in grim despair, but can only find rest when they bow before the eternal throne and say "Even so, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in Thy sight." "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." Surely then it is a song of faith compact of abiding human elements ; glad wonder, dreamlike astonishment, laughter and tears, serious thought and unconquerable hope, all play their part. This simple song has rung through the ages bearing an ever-enlarging divine message, but the message is woven into the common fibre of human experience. Its terminology is not different, but its faith is lofty and its philosophy deep ; in the language of common life it enshrines the germ of the greatest thoughts of God and the world. In its interpretation the learned commentary may help us a little, but our greatest help is in a true interpretation of our own sorrow and a larger appreciation of the struggles of humanity. We know what tears are for ; in our despondent moods, we call this earth a vale of tears (vi. 6 ; xlii. 3 ; lxxx. 5) ; sorrow of many kinds we know, we can never hope to escape completely

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from its shadow (lxxxix. 48 ; cvii. 39) ; joy also is our portion, how else could we bear the burden of life (iv. 7 ; ciii.). Out of these common feelings come all the varied pictures and changing music of human life. The mournful dirge (xxxix.), the stirring battle march (lxviii.), the wail of defeat (xliv. 9), the song of victory (lxxii.), are pitched in these familiar tones. The drama of human life is wrought out in the action and reaction of these changing moods. The picture is always produced by the conflict of light and shade ; sometimes a sombre tone prevails (cxxii.), again it is bright and hopeful, while elsewhere it passes through darkness to a richer light (lxxiii.). Here it is a song of hope by one who had known the pain of suspense and disappointment. To the poet the future is not hopeless because he finds God in history and in himself.

We would not rob the song of its simplicity by reading into it later developments of thought of which the poet never dreamed ; we frankly confess that his was a small, simple world. But we just as firmly maintain that his words mean more to us than they did to himself. The advantage of true poetic expression is that it puts the great thought in prophetic form, in a form that craves a larger meaning and will receive such meaning as soon as the world is ready for it. The acorn contains the oak minus the soil and time. Mere time may be empty and barren if the seed is not there. This man's vision was not limited by the next harvest ; he wanted a new world ; the new world comes slowly and many tragedies

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intervene; each stage has its painful price, but saints and poets of this temper make the new world possible. Tears of disappointment, of perplexity and pain, have been shed by men who wrestled with life's deeper problems, but even through their blinding tears they had a glimpse of the new city of God.

Is it not well then in connection with this simple song, which now seems to float serenely above our homely cares, to remember that what seems at first a narrow literal interpretation is the real beginning? The reference to the harvest is not to be despised, the thought is firmly rooted in the soil, the vision is touched with the light of common day. The cry "Give us this day our daily bread," was living in the hearts of men before the Great Teacher made it current coin in our common prayer. The Hebrew poet was close to mother earth and his new Kingdom created by redemptive grace was to be this old earth cleansed from the storms of nature and the wickedness of men. Even now with all our complex civilisation we rest upon the earth and we regard the honest toiler on the land as one who is a co-worker with God for the common good. To sow the seed is itself an act of faith; the man goes forth with a sense of responsibility and a feeling of uncertainty; the present reality is that of toiling and giving, the future harvest is a vision of faith. It is his to work and give and then to watch and wait. The divine order is that summer and winter, seed time and harvest, shall not fail. But disappointment was not unknown. Sometimes there was famine, and sometimes cruel enemies came and reaped or

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destroyed where others had sown. We long for certainty, comfort and rest. Still man cannot live by exceptions; he must meet these with courage when they come, he must rest upon the wholesome rule, he must trust his seed to nature which is to him another name for God. To the poet nature was not a machine, it was alive, responsive to man's physical needs and influenced by his life, thrown out of order by his sins (2 Sam. xxi. 1.). To us this may now seem ancient and fantastic, but it was a real human element in Hebrew theology and it may, at least, serve to show that the connection between the literal and larger views of the text is extremely close. We do not reach a fuller application of sowing and reaping by any artificial allegorising but by getting back to the primitive view of the unity of things. It was not that a natural operation was consciously regarded as symbolic of a spiritual principle. The ancient poet could not have spoken of "natural law in a spiritual world" because the distinctions that make such a speech possible had not been worked out. He did not discuss the oneness of the world but it was implied in his thought. The great deliverances of the past, the lessons learned in sorrow and through God's new gift of chastened joy, were to him the pledge and promise of the future glory. The joy of harvest was to him the symbol and suggestion of still richer blessings. It is still an act of faith to accept this simple statement, "they that sow in tears shall reap in joy," as a wide far-reaching principle that covers the whole of history and life. But this is not by any means "blind faith,"

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which is a contradiction in terms. In this man's faith we have the highest reason of his time touched with imagination and aflame with intense feeling.

Our faith to-day should have behind or within it a larger range of knowledge, it should help to give a living unity to the more varied drama of history and the more complex circumstances of life. We should be driven back to hopeless, helpless scepticism if we did not believe that out of the painful labour, the sorrowful sowing, through which good men seek truth, liberty, and righteousness, there was to be a real and abiding harvest. To our world even as to the Jew of long ago, there comes, just when we hoped for a fuller manifestation of the Kingdom, national disaster and world tragedy. The scale of things is bigger but perhaps the burden of the mystery is not heavier. The victory that overcomes the world, the world of failure, contradictions, and disappointments, is still the victory of faith. Hope still persists, though the golden Kingdom is flung from us when it seemed to be so near. Some things the intervening centuries have taught us, or rather we may say that through their slow progress and in the light of our Saviour's life and the experience of His followers the prophetic thoughts of ancient saints have come to fuller fruition. We know that in a measure the Kingdom has already come, that a great harvest has been reaped from the past, so that we can say in a richer sense "the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places and we have a good heritage"; the vision of truth is a reward in itself as well as an equipment for service, communion with God sustains us in the

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present and links us to the future. True, we still have our hours of discouragement when we think it is vain to cast the seed on hard, dry, unreceptive soil, and we cry, "O Lord, send the refreshing streams and make our wilderness rejoice and blossom as the rose." It is well when apparent failure thus throws us with our burden of fears and cares upon the mercy of our God. It is well also if we learn not to worship superficial success, if we remember that Israel made the greatest contribution to the world not through arrogant power, but through sorrowful service, and the words which receive their supreme application in the everlasting life of our Lord apply also to His lowly servants. "He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SUFFERING SAINT

(Psalm xxii.)

WE are here concerned with the first section of this poem, *vv.* 1-21, and the striking picture of patient suffering that it presents. It may be said that in such a poem of lamentation and prayer there naturally follows praise for deliverance and acknowledgment of the divine mercy to the afflicted one. If that was the conventional form it is all the more likely that a suitable liturgical conclusion would be added to this original expression of severe affliction. This conclusion has its helpful lessons, we do well after deliverance from pain to praise the living God, to express our faith that after all appearances He is not careless as to the afflicted and does not hide His face from them. This closing hymn *vv.* 22 ff. has its interesting features, especially its universal claim for Israel's religion and the world-wide significance of the redemptive power of Yahweh in His beneficent ministry to the afflicted and the meek. Such expressions of faith are found elsewhere in the Psalter and belong naturally to the worship of the temple and the synagogue. That they are linked to this striking poem is a manifestation, even if somewhat formal, of the belief that the sigh of sorrow and the cry of despair cannot be the last word in the presence of God.

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We turn then to that which is in any case the real heart of the Psalm, the classic picture of intense suffering and deep depression, a picture that is forever associated with the supreme honour in the life of Him who with all His radiant joy is "the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." The opening words of the poem (cf. xlii. 9), familiar as they are, can never be commonplace; though they express a thought not uncommon in Old Testament literature, they ring out with a quite peculiar force; the simple words, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me," by their absolute simplicity and sincerity find an echo in the heart of every man who has faced the strange realities of life; reinforced by the association of Calvary they become the symbol of life's deepest mystery, the union of innocence and suffering. We speak of the poet as one of "the saints" though he does not place himself in that class; he utters no claims to integrity, no protestations of innocence. It is because of his temper, his style of treatment in relation to the great subject of suffering, that we thus speak of him. There is no fierce invective against persons or against fate, and yet there is nowhere a more pathetic lamentation. The language is alive with real feeling, the figures are vivid, creating the impression of one who is suffering intense loneliness and bitter pain, though they do not reveal the writer's precise circumstances and condition. This poem handles suffering not as a problem but as experience; the poet is dealing not with a philosophy of the world, but with the facts of his own life. Thus the grim fact of suffering as it stands

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between a man and his God is powerfully presented. Suffering and prayer, these two constant elements in the life of a sincere soul, speak to us in thrilling tone. It is not morbid analysis, artificial realism, it is a simple statement of the tragic honour that has come to many of the noblest of our race. There is no stoic indifference, no fierce pride in man's capacity to bear suffering and defy fate, no terrible arraignment of Providence and society; just the facts, the wounds upon the body and the scars upon the soul telling their own tale, pleading for sympathy and help.

The silence and distance of God in the hour of sorrow is the cause of distress. Sorrow is near, uttering itself in loud lamentation, yet God seems far away, not paying any attention. By day the sufferer makes his appeal to God, and there is no response; at night he has no rest. To a true Israelite this cannot mean a denial of God. The mystery is that God is in His heaven and yet a praying soul is troubled and tormented. "But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." God is still there, the rightful object of Israel's worship. This expression is peculiar and perhaps we should follow the Greek version and read, "But Thou dwellest in the sanctuary. Israel's praise is Thine." God is a real presence and inspiring joy to many, but the afflicted soul finds no present consolation for himself.

Another contrast is formed by the remembrance of Yahweh's redemptive power and gracious guidance revealed in the realm of history

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Our fathers trusted in Thee :

They trusted, and Thou didst deliver them.

They cried unto Thee and were delivered ;

They trusted in Thee and were not ashamed.

Here the long story of the past is put into a brief symmetrical statement. The poet is not so blinded by his tears but he can still read the lesson, writ large in the story of his nation's life, that men do not trust in Israel's God and reap confusion. History is thus a help, but tradition cannot take the place of experience. Religion must be the power that meets the present problems and not merely a collection of formulas from the past. Each soul must fight its own battle and prove its own faith. Here is the hard fact of experience that must be faced and conquered (*vv.* 6-10) ; a man who believes that God acted the part of father to him at the beginning of his life, who had been sheltered and guided in days of weakness, so that trust in God had become part of his life, is now publicly scorned and told in bitter irony to cast his care upon Yahweh (*cf.* xxxvii. 5), seeing that he is one of Heaven's favourites. The cross transformed from a sign of shame to a sacred symbol of sorrow has taught the world that "the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" may be, in the highest sense, the servant of God and humanity. This has surely done much to change our temper in relation to those who suffer in a righteous cause, as well as to those who are in any sense "unfortunate." In our own way, we still worship success, but success is not a synonym for God. The bravest man feels the atmosphere of the time in which he lives, and our poet

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is met by an interpretation of life which makes misfortune a reproach to himself or his God. No wonder that he cries "Be not far from me, O Yahweh; for trouble is near and there is no helper." He is, as it were, surrounded by wild bulls, fierce lions, and unclean dogs; who the people were whose lack of pity led him to use such strong language we cannot say, nor what were the exact circumstances of his trial and bitter persecution. But this is clear, that it is one of the most striking pictures of loneliness and helplessness in the face of cruel oppression:

I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It is melted in the midst of my bowels.

The meaning and connection of the phrase "they pierced my hands and my feet" is quite uncertain, but at this point the sufferer seems to be a prisoner facing popular fury and unjust condemnation. Everything is lost except "the soul" or "the life," and the final appeal is made to God.

But be not Thou far off, O Yahweh,
O Thou my strength, make haste to help me.
Deliver my soul from the sword;
My precious life from the power of the dog.

Men have taken away his comfort, his good name, his standing with God; now they would take life itself, the priceless possession that cannot be replaced; in such an hour the only appeal is to heaven. So far then we have a picture of a man or nation in the hour of deepest distress falling with all his weight of care

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Upon the great world's altar stairs,
That slope through darkness up to God.

There is no theoretical discussion or theological solution ; but is not this true, that for all of us, when we are actually in the grip of life's most tragic experience, this is the only way—to cast ourselves upon God and to hope that no enemy can finally destroy this precious thing, our life, our soul, and its trust in Him ?

Anyone familiar with history knows that, whatever may have been the exact circumstances out of which it arose, this is no artificial picture, the man who wrote it spoke of himself, but he drew his images and colours from the lives of the saints and the experience of his nation. The long martyrdom of Jeremiah and the fierce struggles of his people furnish many features of the tragedy. When our Lord uttered this despairing cry, He entered into deepest communion with the saints who had gone before ; and the martyrs who have followed in His steps have drawn strength from the memory of His great passion. Our view of the nature of prediction and of the whole scope of prophecy may differ in many respects from that of His immediate disciples, but we feel that their instinct was right in finding in this psalm a picture of His sufferings. Much more than in the case of the original writer must it be true that His sorrow, the contradiction of sinners against Himself, came through His larger vision of truth, His nobler fidelity to duty, His complete consecration to God and humanity, He who saved others could not save Himself. The mystery of the sense of innocence along with

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a passing feeling of separation from God remains, but the fact also remains that the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering and that there is no form of human agony that He did not know. We are thankful for any hints in the Old Testament or elsewhere toward a *rational* interpretation of suffering, for we know that, in the experience of suffering, supreme love and highest reason meet, but in the solemn mystic hour when we meet our fate all "systems" fall away and we are alone with our sorrow and our God.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SOUL IN EXILE

Pss. xlii., xliii.

It is evident that these two psalms are one poem; this may be seen by the unity and progress of the subject and the three-fold refrain, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" The man who wrote it probably used the personal name of Israel's God, "Yahweh," which was changed when it was brought into the present collection (See p. 25., cf. Pss. xiv. and liii.). For our purpose in using the song in meditation and praise the universal name "God" is better, as it helps to lift the teaching out of a narrow local circle. But as we go back, and seek to revise the actual experience of a fellow-man the concrete historical form of the prayer and the local colour of his aspiration are significant. Though we believe in a personal God, we do not now need a proper name; all such names as Yahweh, Jove, or the like, have what we call a pagan or heathen flavour. We cannot, however, understand the history of religion without remembering the part such names have played. To the Jew the name of their father's God "Yahweh," and the name of their sacred city, "Jerusalem," are words of power, in the psalms as elsewhere; not mere labels are they, but watch-words that bring into living play all the forces of

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piety and patriotism. "My soul thirsteth for God" is now, as a phrase, the fittest vehicle for expressing the intense desire of any needy soul of the one living, eternal God; its original form was, "My soul thirsteth for Yahweh, my God, whose supreme manifestation is in the high religious festival at Jerusalem." The pure, mystic, universal religion cannot, without loss, cut itself off from this human element of local association and slow growth. In our own day, we are learning how much there is surviving in the life of men and nations that is tribal and sectarian in its character, we claim a universal culture and yet continue to worship local idols. The Jew in frankness and honesty clung to the God of his fathers and the temple of his ancestors and unconsciously prepared the way for the destruction of religious monopoly, but not for the banishment of hallowed associations and patriotic sentiment. Then the spirit transcended the form; with us it may fail to rise to the height of its own claim.

"When shall I come and appear before God?" here also the Jewish scholar has been at work to modify the fearless expression used by men of an earlier time. It seems clear that this sentence should be translated, "When shall I come and see the face of God?"—it goes back to a period when men really saw their God in the temple service, or in some specific symbol. In the religious festivals they ate and drank and saw God (Ex. xxiv. 11); in their worship they had some sight or vision of their God. In the course of time men came to have more reverence for and less familiarity with their God.

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The words then had to be manipulated to mean "to let oneself be seen in the presence of God"; it was the worshipper who appeared before God, not God who appeared to His servants. No man could see God and live; the puny mortal must cast himself in the dust before an awful, invisible God. In this there is advance, gain, but there may also be loss. Our stern puritanism in purifying the dogma may destroy the poetry; in cleansing us from superstitions, it may sweep away some innocent suggestive symbols. In some real sense the temple must still give us the vision of God; He still says to us "Seek ye my face," and calls for the eager response "Thy face, Yahweh, will I seek" (xxvii. 8). Men's views concerning this central fact of life, the vision of God, must of course pass through many changes; it is found at first in some small specific thing, then under the dissolving power of thought it has passed away into the heavens, all symbols have become too small, but later it must come back in natural images and poetic forms transforming the whole world into a temple of God.

Looking at the whole poem we find it a noble work of art, showing the touch of real poetic genius. Truth and strength are here linked to beauty of form. As it left the hand of its author it was no doubt carefully, though not slavishly, wrought out, artistic but not too artificial. It has an orderly structure of three strophes, and a thrice repeated refrain; perhaps also the piercing cry, "Where is now thy God?" appeared three times (xlii. 3, 10; xliii. 2). There is a certain naturalness in this

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arrangement, we cannot say that undue attention is paid to outward form; there is still sufficient freedom and spontaneity to show that the outward expression is servant to the inward substance. As the poet heard the roaring of the turbulent waters, so we can hear the movement of his spirit throbbing all through the poem with keen desire and at last with conquering hope.

One thing is clear, the man is driven from home, cut off from the temple, from enjoyment of its services and communion with its friends. That is all that we know in the way of external fact, we cannot say whether the calamity has come through the intervention of a foreign foe or as the result of faction and intrigue at home. Cruel facts and bitter circumstances there were in connection with his flight and separation from the temple; if we knew too many of these perhaps they might distract us from the essential features of the situation—a man driven from home who is feeling that he is in some measure driven from the joy of worship and from the special presence of God. It would be interesting to know the character of his enemies, and how far there was fault as well as misfortune in his lot. Only a man of noble spirit could have written this poem, and though he may have had infirmities and imperfections, he does not, in his rushing words, show harsh bitterness against men or rash impatience towards God. In Job or Jeremiah we have such human moods carried to extreme lengths of violent speech and passionate reproach. Here, without lack of poetic vividness, there is calmness and

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resignation, stirred by a hope that is persistent if not triumphant.

His soul is athirst for God as the hart pants after the cooling stream, or the dry earth longs for rain; instead of the joyful banquet with cheerful friends he has had loneliness and tears. Then he heard the sharp cry, mocking, ironical, it sounded in his ears, "Where is now thy God?" How natural this is—that memory should wander back to a more joyful past, and he should think of the time when he held an honourable place among the bands of eager pilgrims and enthusiastic worshippers. The atmosphere of common worship returns, he can hear the strains of music and can catch the echo of glad voices. This past that returns so powerfully, can it not be real again, may his soul not hope in God to bring back that hour of worship that had in it such exquisite pleasure and high inspiration? He will cling to this hope, but as for his present condition he has to admit that his soul is cast down, that the roaring of the cataracts sounding in his ears is the fit symbol of his spiritual condition. In the world of the soul, as well as in the noisy river not so far away, "deep calleth unto deep," all is restlessness and confusion; yet for this man there is refuge in prayer, and he will turn to God with the cry, "Why dost Thou forget me?" Far from the temple, his desire can still go out after his God. This man is not appointed to give a new revelation, namely that in sorrow and separation a man may find a vision that the temple with all its splendour could not give. No, with him God and temple, though not identical, are very closely

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associated. The complete victory, the restored communion for him, will be when God sends out again light and truth to lead him back to the holy hill. The hour of real deliverance for him will be when he can go again to the altar of God, making melody not only in his heart but also upon the harp. The æsthetic associations of temple and altar were for him a real part of religion. The crowds, the music, the incense have something divine in them, through these the memories of the past mercies were preserved and the presence of God suggested with subtle living power. Poet though he was, he could not well dispense with these sensuous accompaniments; some poets have found such things a hindrance to real communion and ecstasy, they had their own world: this man had his peculiarity; but as to the essential matter, the living relation to God, they are the same.

We have all to face, as this man did, the world, our own soul, and God. This threefold question is significant, "Where is now thy God?" "Why hast Thou forgotten me?" "Why art thou cast down, O mysoul?" They all attack, from a different point of view, the same problem. If it were really true, as they imply, that failure, persecution, and sorrow are a reliable sign of God's indignation and withdrawal, then the hour of success is to be back among the shouting crowds that throng the temple courts. If not, it may be that the real hour of conquest is the hour of darkness on the cross, and that the cry, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" is only the passing tribute to human weakness which even

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the highest must pay. These are all real questions with which the noblest souls have wrestled; the man who asks such questions is at any rate not dead. What the poet attempts is what religion should fit us to do, to face boldly the critical world, to look up to God and in courage command our own souls.

“ While they continually say unto me, Where is now thy God ? ” Do we call this a real or a rhetorical question ? It is both, but that does not mean that any particular person met him in his flight or came to him in his captivity and hissed these bitter words in his ear. Certainly the words were actually spoken in the olden time to defeated men, who had boasted of their trust in God. Men in weakness and affliction were told that if they really had a God, He did not seem to be any real help. In days when there was no triumphant faith in the future, it is little wonder that men expected God to do His duty here and that duty was to make His servants happy. When they saw a man bearing an unusual burden of woe, they esteemed him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted (Isa. liii.). This question “ Where is now thy God ? ” is all the sharper, it bites all the harder, because it is not the small satire of some one man’s personal spite, but concentrates in itself the conventional theology of the age against which noble men had fought in vain. The poet is in this respect a representative man, a representative sufferer, he feels the criticism that is in the atmosphere of his time; he does not resent it with angry passion, or conduct a fierce polemic against it, but it wounds him. At home in an honoured position, in the gladness of jubilant

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worship, he felt himself to be strong because he was in the presence of God, now in loneliness the fiery dart of this cynical criticism pierces his soul. At the very moment when the pain is sharpest and the disappointment keenest, this cry, with its myriad voices of a popular opinion, comes back upon him. Was it any wonder that he should wince and writhe and find in the stormy waters the symbol of his own spiritual unrest? The poet does not give a statement or discussion of the problem (see Ps. lxxiii.), but simply shows how the common dogma as to the origin of suffering aggravates the position of the man who is cut off from his regular sources of light and comfort.

When we have gone over all these aspects of history and phases of human thought, we are left with something permanent, a sublime expression of man's deep and pressing need. "My soul thirsteth for God." This cry has gone out into all the world, and found recognition among all types of men, apart from the precise tone that it first possessed. It is a cry that tends to free itself from personal peculiarities and local colour, and become a word of universal significance and abiding power. Men who are strangers in many things can meet at this point. Our knowledge, attainments, culture, may separate us; our sense of a common need brings us together; this is a very deep touch of nature that makes us kin, this feeling of a keen hunger after the Love and Light that God alone can give. This is the divinest thing in the poem, because it is the most intensely human, because it refuses to be bound even to the

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glories of Jerusalem, because suffering lays bare the soul and proves that when once a man awakes to the realities of life, he sees that you cannot separate the human and divine ; the name of such separation is death ; there is that in our God-given nature that turns back to its source, that yearns and hungers for God. So it comes to pass that one of the simplest, and yet one of the deepest words in all literature is this, " As the hart panteth after the water courses, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God." It is in some hour of personal sorrow or national calamity, when the question, " Why hast Thou forgotten me," is wrung from the soul, that this longing gains new depth and intensity. At such a time we must all face bravely our own soul, confront the world with courage and carry our questions to the throne of God.

CHAPTER XX

CONTRASTED MOODS : DEPRESSION AND FAITH

(Pss. xc., xci.)

THESE two poems standing side by side are in sharp contrast as to their attitude towards life, and yet in their own way they are both expressions of faith. In those days speculative atheism was not within the range of debate, it was a question of which was the strongest god, or in other words a struggle between a higher and lower form of faith. If we care to use such words we might with this qualification speak of xc. as "pessimistic" and xci. as "optimistic" in tone. In one we have the view that for all men this is a sorrowful world on which sin has left its mark, so that even the longest life with fullest success has a sense of failure brooding over it ; in the other there is a light-hearted buoyancy that laughs at all kinds of dangers and declares that for the pious safety and success are secure. Every man to whom religion is a reality and who has known the varied experiences of life can sympathise with both these moods. Beside the open grave we have often heard the serious tones of the first and in the sanctuary have sung the hopeful strains

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The man who once has found abode
Within the secret place of God,
Shall with Almighty God abide,
And in His shadow safely hide.

The well known hymn sung by many Christians as the last moments of an old year ebb away, has not preserved the full measure of sadness of the original psalm, though it does present clearly the contrast between mortal man and the eternal God.

Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

It is well that we have in the psalms not mere versified theology or conventional liturgy, but actual expressions of the conflicts of personal faith in its hours of sadness as well as of triumph (cf. Ps. lxxiii., Chap. XXI.). In our study of these living poems we find something universal; even the fuller light of Christian faith and a larger philosophy of life do not reduce to a rigid scheme the changing scenes of life and the varying moods of the soul. If men are true to themselves, and not mere echoes of a dominant system, they must still fight their own battles and understand these aspects of life. But the way in which these things are expressed takes its tone and colour from the age in which men live. Three things in this connection may be remembered. It was the fool not the philosopher who said, "There is no god;" men might live "godless" lives, but they could not conceive of a world without a god. The belief in personal

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immortality was not sufficiently deep and widespread to lighten very much the consideration of serious life-problems. And there is still lingering in these discussions of life the question of "profit." Does piety pay here and now was a real question, and men were only beginning to have a glimpse of the truth that goodness may be its own reward, or that God Himself is the portion and reward of His people.

Apart from the closing verses 13-17, which have probably been expanded for liturgical purposes, Ps. xc. gives us a contrast between the greatness of God and the littleness of man, similar in some respects to Ps. viii., but the subject is treated in a different spirit. Creation is referred to here as well as there, but there is no elaboration of details; we have reached a more abstract style, where the contrast is set so strongly between the eternity of God and the ephemeral nature of human life. Here the tone while reverent is sad, the spirit of the poet is bowed down under the weight of this awful distance between the creator and the creature.

With our view of the growth of Israel's religious life, we cannot regard the inscription, "A prayer of Moses, the man of God," as having any real authority, but it is interesting as a specimen of early criticism. Scholars of that day did not understand the "perspective" of their own history, and while they knew that the maintenance of the true religion had involved continuous struggle they had little idea of intellectual development. It is not likely that the strong, thoughtful man who wrote the poem wished

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to "personate" Moses; rather when it was first studied some one who noted its connection with the narratives of Genesis and its submissive acceptance of a great truth ascribed it to the great leader of those distant early times. This was a fitting tribute to its simplicity and pathetic power. When we examine it more closely, we are deeply impressed by it as the plaintive utterance of a certain view of life. In a sense, it is not profound, the thoughts are simple but great, they are great because based so broadly on the stern facts of life. God's eternal presence and power, the Being to whom a thousand years are as one day; man with his ceaseless procession of generations and yet in his individual life the passing creature of a day, sin as the explanation of man's weakness exaggerating and embittering the contrast. Here are the great elements of life, which the writer arranges in his own fashion. There is no cynical scorn, no splendid rebellion, but a reverent subjection to the will of God as to an unbending fate, and prayer that man may learn to interpret and use even this sad life with wisdom. Not yet the joyful cry "Thy will is our peace," and yet there is a movement in that direction. There is something genuine, absolutely sincere, we may even say massive, in this short poem, as into a few sharp strokes the weight of these tremendous truths—God, man and sin—is concentrated. Detailed criticism strengthens this impression; it is possible that the word "dwelling-place" or "refuge" (Gk.) did not originally stand in the first line and that the verse was a naked assertion of the eternity of Israel's God (xc. 1, 2).

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O Yahweh, Thou hast been through all ages,
And from eternity Thou wast God.

Then he touches lightly the story of creation as told in the records of his people (cf. Ps. civ.). If there is any mythological allusion it is in the distant background ; the present text is too uncertain to show that God is regarded as the Father of the world, or that the earth gave birth to the mountains (cf. Deut. xxxii. 18 and R.V. margin). Considering the versions " Before the mountains were born " is the safest translation. In verse 3 there is a reference to the fact that man comes from the dust and returns thither (Gen. iii. 19), and the writer was no doubt thinking of death as the curse upon man's disobedience. It has been suggested that we should read :

(Do not) turn man back to dust ;
And say, " Return, ye sons of mankind."

In that case, we should have an expostulation with the eternal God on behalf of mortal man, and a prayer to revoke the primal curse. That would certainly give a bold turn to the appeal, but it seems more likely that we have simply a statement of man's limited career and mortal destiny ; " Thou carriest them away as a flood, they are as a sleep " is also uncertain ; a plausible conjecture gives us

" Thou sowest them from year to year,
They are like grass that groweth up."

The generations of men are compared to the short-lived herbs of the field ; there is a constant succession,

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but the individuals wither and quickly pass away. Such a view of life does not appear to be strong and heroic ; it is the very picture of helplessness and futility. The "withering" power is God's anger against sin and His knowledge of all our vanity and meanness. "We spend our years as a tale *that is told.*" This striking phrase, which speaks of empty repetition and wearisome routine is thoroughly fixed in our language, but it is more than a doubtful rendering of the original

All our days pass away in Thy wrath,
Like a sigh are the days of our years.

Very expressive that word "sigh," it might serve as a description of the poem ; and yet it is not senseless groaning, there is an intelligent though sorrowful view of life and a religious tone of resignation. Man's life is short, and even at its greatest length it is a heavy burden and a futile task. To live out the three score years and ten and pass away in peace is not this man's ideal, it does not meet his desire. His refuge is in prayer that, numbering his days with a sober sense of responsibility, he may gain a mind that is wise enough to accept life as it comes from God's hand, and find in it something deeper than its surface appearances. If there is any gladness to be found, it must come from Him who has ordained all this sorrow. Truly a noble "complaint" which has come to us from a distant past and found an echo in many hearts !

When we turn to the following psalm, we are struck by the contrast: it is in comparison light-hearted,

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its view of piety and providence is confident, even triumphant; it not only looks calmly at common ills, it even laughs at the special calamities of pestilence and war. After brooding over these sober reflections on the stern facts of ordinary life, as set forth in plaintive tones (xc.), this seems almost childish and unnatural, yet in its own way it is as human and helpful as the other. In all ages, there have been strong men who have lived in sympathy with both these expressions of faith; the soul after dwelling in the valley of humiliation sometimes climbs eagerly to sunlit heights. In the very rebound from deep depression, men have gone forth into the thick of the battle feeling that they were in the hands of God, and that no weapon could avail against them until their task was done.

The poem opens with a declaration concerning the man who dwells under the shadow of Yahweh's protecting care; it would be more effective in form if, as some conjecture, it originally began "Blessed is the man who dwells in the secret place of the Highest One, etc." Such a man, we are told (probably we should read the third person instead of the first), calls Yahweh his refuge, rejoices that the God of Israel is his God, a home to which he can flee from danger, a strong fortress where he can find security. Without this protection there are many evils to which he would fall a victim, caught like a bird in a snare he might go to an untimely grave. As the bird is sheltered under its mother's wing, so the trusting soul is guarded by God's truth, that is, His faithfulness (it is possible, however, that 4c should come after

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v. 7, we should then have the couplet: "It shall not come nigh thee; His truth shall be thy shield and buckler"). The pious man can face calmly what we call natural evils, the baleful influence of the moon, the hurtful stroke of the sun, the raging power of pestilence and storm. But to the Semites these forces were not "natural" in our sense, but the powers of wicked demons that fill the night with terror and sometimes infest the day. Surely this is a "special providence" when men fall by myriads and the godly one passes through all unscathed. He can look and see the wicked perish, for he has taken Yahweh for his refuge (v. 9a should probably read—"As for thee, Yahweh is thy refuge"). Here the doctrine emerges that calamity is the punishment of sin. It is put in a bold poetic form, but the author would scarcely have maintained it as absolute and without exception. One commentator calls attention to the striking passage, 2 Macc. xii. 40 ff., "And upon the following day, as it had become a matter of necessity, Judas and his men came to carry off the bodies of them that had fallen, and to bury them with their kinsmen in their fathers' graves. But under the coats of every one of the dead they found things consecrated to the idols of Jamnia, which is forbidden the Jews by the law. And it became clear to all that this was the cause wherefore they had fallen." In the same lofty strain it is maintained that no evil shall strike the saint and his tent shall be inviolate. For if there are demonic powers in the world there are also good angels, "sent forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. i. 14; Matt. iv. 11;

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Luke xxiv. 23). To the faithful in those days this was not mere poetry but sacred reality. The man who has the angels on his side need not fear wild beasts. Then comes the conclusion, possibly sung by different voices, in direct speech of Yahweh giving confirmation to the spirit of the poem.

Because he depends on Me, I deliver him ;
I protect him, for he knows My name ;
He calls upon Me, therefore I will hear him ;
I am with him in trouble ;
I deliver him and honour him.
With long life will I satisfy him,
And cause him to see My salvation.

“ Salvation ” here is not to be taken in the modern theological sense, but rather as a promise that the faithful man shall see days of glory and success promised to his people, when “ the Kingdom of God,” as then understood, shall have come to those who have waited for the consolation of Israel. The fact that the poem treats tragedies as trifles and rides so easily over difficulties might provoke a touch of cynical irritation even in good men who are struggling after a firmer faith. But as the expression of a triumphant mood, rather than as a reasoned philosophy, it must be judged. Emphasis has been laid upon the passive nature of the psalm that it calls simply for protection and does not cry for strength and inspiration in heroic conflicts. That may be true, but we need not ask a man for what he does not profess to give ; as a matter of fact, however, men using the psalms for practical purposes have not enquired so curiously or distinguished so finely, they

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have gone into the thick of the fight with these simple words ringing in their ears, and have accepted victory as the gift of an ever watchful Providence. They have proved that faith and fatalism are not necessarily the same.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PROBLEM OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

(Pss. lxxiii., xxxvii., xlix.)

THESE three psalms have this in common, that they deal with the fortunes of the good and the wicked, and that in none of them is there an absolutely clear reference to another world or a future life. (See below on lxxiii. 24). It is here if anywhere in this book, that we should expect to find such reference, so we have to admit that in facing the dark problem of the failure of faithful workers, little if any comfort is drawn from the thought of future compensation of the individual sufferer. We feel now that religion and virtue would suffer a terrible loss, if not a mortal wound, were the thought of personal immortality to be weakened or withdrawn. But it may serve to remind us of the many-sided power of religion, to remember that men did cherish a noble piety when their view of God's action was confined to this earth, and a man's only hope of continuance in active life was in and through his descendants. (Unfortunately it is not certain whether we should take the word "end" xxxvii. 37 in the sense of "future" or "posterity"). Psalm xxxvii. is well known, many of its sweet soothing sayings have entered into our

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vocabulary. Who has not felt the calming power of such words as "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him," "Delight thyself also in the Lord: And He shall give thee the desires of thine heart," "I have seen the wicked in great power and spreading himself, etc.," "Mark the perfect man, etc."? But what we have here is not a poem or a song; it is a collection of pious, trustful sayings after the manner of certain sections of Proverbs. We are far from the violently controversial atmosphere of the book of Job; the author is calm in his faith and content in his orthodoxy. An old man (*v.* 25), he is satisfied with his own experience and pleased with his view of life. He has gathered together what has been called "a string of pearls" and arranged them in alphabetic order; that is not the procedure of an original thinker or passionate debater. There is no argument or heat in his discourse; indeed he assures us that there is no need for fretful worry. There is no use, in view of the coming judgment, to get excited and angry over the problems of life (*v.* 8). The absolute calmness might be irritating to a man deeply engaged with these same problems, but even with its conventional air, it has a certain simplicity and strength.

If we accept the view of several scholars that, for various reason, Ps. xlix. 15, "But God will redeem my life from the power of Sheol, for He will receive me," should be regarded as the marginal note of a pious reader, based upon lxxiii. 24, then the contribution of this psalm to this great problem is not very significant. This may surprise all the more because it is heralded by a solemn and rather pretentious introduction.

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The writer claims that his statement must make a wide appeal to all regions and classes, because he will bring forth wisdom in the form of an oracle and throw light upon one of the enigmas of human life.

Hear this, all ye peoples,
Give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world :
Both high and low,
Rich and poor together.
My mouth shall speak wisdom ;
And the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding.
I will incline mine ear to a parable :
I will open my dark saying upon the harp.

What, then, is this dark saying or riddle, and what is the exposition of it? It may perhaps be found in the refrain *v.* 12, accidentally omitted after *v.* 4, and altered in *v.* 20.

Man in magnificence does not abide,
Like the beasts he is cut off.

Even the splendour of a man's position, and the arrogance of his spirit may be a danger instead of a protection, and only hasten his entrance into that shadowy, gloomy realm to which all are doomed to go. If this is a quotation or a popular saying, the poet does not add much to it. He has a certain strength and satisfaction in confronting those who "trust in their wealth" with the stern fact that no man can redeem himself or pay to God a ransom price. Wealth was power, then as now; it could bribe the earthly judge and secure flattery from the crowd, but in the presence of death and before the throne of God its value vanished. Let not man expect to purchase reprieve from God or by gold attempt to

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stay the hand of that dread shepherd that men call Death. Much less can the power of riches reach into that sombre realm, "For when he dieth, he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him." Most of us have at times had a grim satisfaction in dwelling on the limitations of "the almighty dollar," but that does not carry us far towards a positive solution of life's serious problems. We can sympathise with the man who in a spirit of faith sets over against the assertion, "he cannot redeem his life," the trustful affirmation, "but God will redeem my life and take me to Himself."

When we turn to Ps. lxxiii. we find a real poem and a living discussion; it is the story of a man's experience of struggle with himself and the great world-problem. There are difficulties in details of the picture, but the outline is clear. There is real movement that we can trace from step to step, and thus learn the nature and outcome of the spiritual battle. Note that it is a *spiritual* battle; this man no doubt had his weakness of temper and his failures of conduct, but the battle that he describes here was fought in the arena of the soul, it was a struggle in thought, a mental conflict. The statement has a certain order; it begins with the conclusion reached—"God is good to the righteous, even Yahweh to the clean of heart"—and shows how this faith held as a matter of teaching and tradition had been almost lost, but that a fuller survey of the facts of life and a deeper knowledge of self had been regained and lifted into a clearer light. It is on a smaller scale and without the magnificent dramatic setting the problem of the

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book of Job. It is the problem that each true believer must solve in his own fashion, if he is to possess something deeper than a conventional creed. The teaching comes to us in the highest possible form, that is, in the self-expression of the human soul that has faced doubt and despair. It is one of the divinest utterances of the Psalter, and comes nearest to what we, in the Christian sense, call spiritual experience, and yet how natural and human it is, the story of a man's deepest life. He did not consciously think of writing a great poem or preaching a great sermon, but he has given us one of the most intimate documents of the soul simply by stating the actual course of his thought and the progress of his life. He tells us how the doubt arose, how it was arrested, just before it reached what seemed its logical outcome, and how with painful steps he retraced his course until he had won a more intelligent and firmer faith. There is no sense of intellectual superiority, no glorification of doubt, no playing with speculation. The battle is real, severe, the victory is achieved in the light of heaven and by the power of a lowly faith.

Looking out upon the life of the world around him, it seemed to be a quite evident fact that the people who prospered were those who were unscrupulous, who feared not God nor regarded man. The result of prosperity on these people themselves was pride and arrogance. They acted as if the earth belonged to them, and there were no limits to their power. They enjoyed the good things of this world in a coarse, extravagant fashion. Many who were weak and dependent upon successful men of the world took

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them at their own valuation, paid them homage, and in the presence of their brazen boldness showed a cringing subservience instead of a manly independence. After all the pure teaching of the prophets this, then, was what it had come to in Israel, wealth and success of the coarsest kind were more valued than the quiet study of the Law or the eager pursuit of true righteousness. This was a real fact, quite open to the eye of any intelligent observer, and, at the time, it seemed to the poet to be the central fact of life, and of supreme significance. The result was, that the more he considered it, the more it filled the whole horizon of his vision, and he became jealous, envious, irritable—not a pleasant mood, but not unknown to noble men in other lands and ages. Threatening comes the conclusion, there is no real moral government: surely God lives—anything else were unthinkable—but He is remote from this scene of petty strife and does not heed either the loud clamour of the arrogant crowd or our cries of pain and disappointment. This is not an abstract statement, the personal application comes with cruel force.

Surely in vain I cleansed my heart,
And washed my hands in innocency.

At this stage the battle seems to be lost.

What is now to be done? A superficial man might have hastened to the world with his story of failure and scepticism. The poet no doubt had his time of silence and torment. But he could not be silent for ever, he was one of those to whom God had given

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the gift and responsibility of speech. What kind of doctrine is this to preach, will it stand the test of life? This may not be the supreme and only test of truth, but it is one test, and in this case it served to bring a pause and call for a fuller review of the whole situation. If he had resolved to declare this doctrine, based as it seemed to be on the actual facts of life, he would have been a traitor to the generation of God's children. This is strange; I have drawn my creed from life, as I see it, and now when I try to apply it to other aspects of life, it fails! "When I thought how I might know this, it was too painful for me." This man has found the real enigma. There must have been something wrong in the original statement of the case, or some mistake in his reasoning. A conscientious man cannot rush hastily to conclusions that will discourage those who are struggling after goodness, he must review the whole question from another position, and if possible in a clearer light.

Into the light of the sanctuary the question is carried, not necessarily into the temple, but into the atmosphere of truth for which the book and the temple stand. The poet does not run away from life, he does not take shelter in some cloistered place where the hard facts are forgotten. He comes back to the same facts and seeks a larger interpretation. He remembers that the security of the wicked is not so strong as it seems. Behind the offensive glitter of their success, there are grim realities. Oftentimes sudden destruction comes upon them and reveals the rottenness of the foundation on which they stood. The oppressive reality turns out to be a shadowy

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dream. The real things of life remain in the presence of God and man, when arrogant adventures have passed away. Truth and honesty, love and loyalty, still abide.

But if the outward facts were seen in a distorted form and out of proportion, there are also inward realities that had been silently working and that now came to clearer consciousness. The poet had thought that he was a careful impartial observer; now he confesses his stupidity. Surely it was foolish to think that God should pay His servants in the current coin of this realm. The things that those sleek, prosperous people enjoyed—how little they count in life after all! The man who applies earthly measurements and rewards to spiritual qualities must, if the root of the matter is in him, come to acknowledge that he has lapsed into the brutishness that he condemns. This too he sees, that while the hard facts remain, his scepticism was not due altogether to them, but in part to the spirit of the believer. If God had not been with him in the hour of darkness and of strain, he would surely have gone astray. His victory is not to be ascribed to his own cleverness and strength, but to the fact that in some mysterious fashion God kept hold of him. "Nevertheless, I am still with Thee." How strange, subtle, mystic, this communion of God with the man who is really seeking to get at the heart of things. The deepest thing in life is not the glitter and show of worldly success, but a man's fellowship with God. It sounds thin and poor to put it in an abstract form, and say that the vision of truth is its own blessing virtue

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its own reward: how much richer for the common man this declaration, "God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever," if, as we believe, the poet here reaches forth to a life that death cannot destroy, and sees how secure is the foundation on which his hope rests. "Thou guidest me by Thy counsel and takest me to glory"—this is not an exceptional miracle for supermen of the olden time (Gen. v. 24), but for all who can now come into fellowship with God. How paltry all earthly gains seem compared with this possibility, that a man can really enjoy fellowship with his Maker, a bond which survives through temptation and doubt, and enables him to look calmly in the face of death. This man has told us his experience in the presence of certain constant facts of common life, and in the secret place of his soul when wrestling with his own imperfect interpretation of life; is it not possible, across the bounds of time and space, for us to have communion with him and with his God?

CHAPTER XXII

THE SHEPHERD PSALM

(Ps. xxiii.)

THIS is not the only psalm that applies to the God of Israel the suggestive symbol of the shepherd ; neither is this figure the only one in this short poem, but the opening words, " The Lord is my shepherd " are so familiar to us all, and have been so thoroughly appropriated as the language of personal confidence, that it has become in a unique sense " the shepherd psalm." So fully has this psalm entered into the deepest experience of saintly men and women, that we hesitate to approach it in a critical mood. Every phrase in it has gained greater power by contact with the souls of men who learned it in childhood, used it in their later struggles, and faced the final mystery with its tender words upon their lips. The poem is short and expresses the attitude of the soul rather than the circumstances of the man, so that its relations with time and space seem to be slight and vague to begin with, and when these latter have become even more dim through the lapse of centuries and the transference to a Christian atmosphere, it appears to belong to a " timeless " spiritual region. Hence we are inclined to resent the reminder that this idyllic picture of trust and communion bears marks of a real earthly conflict, and that the

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“enemies” were not imaginary, allegorical or spiritual, but real and human, and perhaps members of the same religious community. But surely this declaration of personality is more and not less valuable if it comes from the actual battlefield of life, than from some quiet sheltered retreat.

It is another testimony to the uncertainty of that particular branch of criticism when we find one expert telling us that this little poem has throughout the same metre that can be detected in the second part of Ps. xix., the line with five strong beats with a pause after the third, which may be arranged in this form:

Only goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life ;
And I will dwell in Yahweh's house
For length of days.

While when we turn to another specialist we are told that “the strophes have the unusual feature that the measure changes from a trimeter in the first strophe to a tetrameter in the second and a pentameter in the third. This is an advance towards a climax of joyous faith in Yahweh.” On this view, only the last strophe or four lines has the line of five accents. Whether there is such a “climax” in thought with a correspondence in form is clearly a matter of opinion, but fortunately it can have little influence on our appreciation of the thought and spirit of the poem.

In the opening verse we may translate “I do not want,” “There is nothing lacking, the presence of the shepherd supplies all my needs.” “The waters

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of rest" refers to streams or springs where the flock may find rest and refreshment (cf. Cant. 1, 7, and specially the beautiful passage Isa. xlix. 9, 10). Scholars differ as to the precise meaning of the phrase "paths of righteousness" (cf. viii. 20). The context seems to require not "straight" paths or "paths of salvation," but tracks that are right in the sense that they do not lead into dangerous deviations from the right road. It is pretty well known now that "the valley of the shadow of death" means a dark, gloomy valley, and that there is no reference to death in the word in its correct form. "My cup runneth over"; it is possible that there is in the word used a reference not only to the generous quantity but also to the stimulating quality of the wine (cf. civ. 15). The Hebrew text reads "I will return (to) Yahweh's house," but the grammatical construction requires the common translation "I will dwell, etc."

It is not possible to settle with any certainty the date of this brief poem; scholars assign it to dates that differ by six or seven centuries—a fact that shows that there are no clear grounds on which to base a definite conclusion. The one thing that inclines us to a comparatively late date is the conviction that the psalm expresses an intimate personal relation between the individual soul and God. The figure of a shepherd as applied to rulers and guides, human or divine, was natural to a people whose ancestors were shepherds, and among whom the pastoral vocation continued to be exercised and esteemed. We find this figure used in reference to the community as a

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promise, "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd," Isa. xl. 11; and as a prayer, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock," Ps. lxxx. 1. It is a natural and suggestive symbol of Yahweh, the good shepherd of His people. Here, however, we seem to have a more personal relation, the pious man speaks not simply as one of the community, but as an individual enjoying intimate fellowship with his Lord.

It may be pedantic refinement even to raise the question whether there are three figures or only two in the poem, that is, whether the poet distinguishes the guide from the shepherd; in that case he leaves the shepherd and the sheep in the quiet resting-place, and passes on to the picture of God as the guide of the man in the difficult paths of life, and finally, changes to the figure of a host who lavishly entertains the guest, and by the very fact of such generous welcome assures him of friendship and protection. The figures are oriental, they take us away from our crowded cities and artificial life to the plains where shepherds watch their flocks, or to the lonely paths of the wilderness, but bring us at last to the sanctuary, the house of God.

We are still in the Old Testament, it is Yahweh the personal God of Israel who is addressed, and the temple is still the centre of religious life, but the child-like spirit of confidence, gratitude and hope belongs to the essence of religion in all ages. This certainly is one of the passages that "find" us in our moments of deepest need, and it is a true Christian instinct that has fastened upon it as the classic expression of man's

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confidence in the eternal mercy and as worthy to take its place along with the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer as the summary of a spiritual creed that can by all classes be carried in the memory and treasured in the heart.

CHAPTER XXIII

MORNING AND EVENING HYMNS

(Pss. iii., iv.)

THESE two psalms are similar in style and spirit and probably come from the same pen. It is not possible to fix their date with any certainty, or to ascertain the precise historical circumstances out of which they sprang. That David wrote them when he fled from his son Absalom is the opinion of a Jewish scholar who wished to relate them to actual historical circumstances. That they were so related and were not abstract meditations there is no doubt, though we cannot now define the exact position. In our fully developed liturgy, we have all times and seasons classified, and appropriate hymns and prayers arranged for them. Many of these have been deliberately composed for specific periods, as "Awake my soul and with the sun," or "Glory to Thee, my God, this night." Here we have a more personal note; a man in a high and difficult position declares his confidence in God when he faces the tasks of a new day or seeks rest after toil and conflict (cf. v. 3). From such utterances we learn that in those days life was no easy affair of leisure and enjoyment, but a continual strain, especially for one who bore the burden of public duties in the face of domestic faction or foreign oppressors.

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This man tells us that when he faced the new day it was with a fresh realisation of the difficulty of his position and the multitude of his enemies. He not only sees in his mind's eye the great host, but he hears their cry of triumph; they count him as a doomed man, and exult in the thought that there is no possible salvation or victory for him. This is always an interesting situation, whatever the merits of the case may be, one man standing at bay against a crowd of snarling critics or dangerous foes. We wonder how he maintains his balance and goes along steadily with his high duties. Confidence in God and prayer for help are here indicated as the source of strength. God is to him a shield to ward off malicious attacks, the giver of strength and dignity, enabling him to lift up his head in the presence of his foes. The power of prayer has been proved in the critical hour, from the "holy mount" where God's presence is manifested there has come assurance of help. But help had come in another way, a way that we call "natural." He lay down and fell asleep and awoke refreshed, for Yahweh had kept on sustaining him. How could men keep on with arduous toil and pass through times of severe strain without these hours of absolute rest? When a man is weary, painful things look darker; if he awakes in the middle of the night when the physical vitality is low, the troubles of the day come back like ghosts in the gloom, but after refreshing sleep, in the light of a new day, the sky is clear and bright again. Is not this also a divine ministry, this mercy and mystery of sleep? We lie down in utter helplessness, we become unconscious,

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helpless and of ourselves defenceless, but in this way God has ordained that we should lose our weariness and find strength for new duties. Surely this is one of the miracles of life and whether the sentence "He giveth His beloved sleep" is a correct translation or not it is a noble sentiment (cxxvii. 2). The loss of this common blessing may mean bodily failure and spiritual depression, it will certainly mean unfitness for battle. The courage that comes through this wholesome rest is also a gift of God, and in the strength of it a new hope arises so that this is neither wild boast nor reckless defiance. "I will not fear the myriads of people that have encircled me, set in battle array." We do not know who this man was, and so cannot compare the claim of his faith with the achievements of his life, but we do know that in all ages men like Isaiah and Paul gained great victories because they could truly say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

But evening comes again, and the conflicts of the day have to be reviewed and, as a preliminary to rest, the man's cause committed to God, so we have a companion psalm that closes with an allusion to this mercy and mystery of sleep. The poet begins by setting over against each other the free unmerited favour of God and the arrogance and vanity of men who reject his claims and traduce his character. "God of my right" means the God who vindicates and gives victory to my righteous cause. The claim that he thus makes is that his opponents have committed themselves to a false position and are fighting for a doomed cause, while he possesses the favour and

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help of Yahweh. His experience is that of being delivered from a "tight place," a cramped situation where he was hemmed in on all sides, and there seemed to be no way of escape, but Yahweh cleared space for him where he could breathe, move and fight.

Instead of "Yahweh hath set apart him that is godly for Himself" it is better to translate "hath shown me wonderful kindness," that is, in hearing my prayer. How can factious men expect to stand against one who like a Moses or Samuel is distinguished by having his prayers heard? If his enemies recognise this, they will reconsider the whole matter, lest in their opposition to him they find that they are fighting against God. This may seem to us presumptuous, but we have to remember that the great movements of the world have been carried forward by those who felt that they represented God's righteousness, and that God's cause could never have moved at all if it had had to wait for perfect men. "The fulness of time" came through the efforts of men like ourselves who travelled a dusty road and bore the scars of battle. They might be mistaken in some of their judgments, but they knew it was no use to trust in a vain thing or follow after a lie. This man recommends his critics to cherish strong feeling with restrained thoughtfulness, and correct worship with real trust in Yahweh. He believes in energy and movement, but wishes to see it guided by intelligence and regulated by the law of God. The text is difficult, but this seems to be the general sense. The poet is a man in high position, prince or priest, and he finds that the mass of weary dispirited people

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are almost as much of a burden to him as the sharp critics and active opponents. These people cry "Who will show us any good? Our circumstances are miserable, we have little confidence in our leaders, in what direction can we look for a return of good fortune and an increase of blessing?" This is a crucial question; this leader might have replied in his own simple strong words, "Yahweh also is the refuge of His people and their help in the hour of need," but he uses effectively words from the priestly blessing that have rich spiritual associations, "O Yahweh, lift upon us the light of Thy countenance" (Numb. vi. 4). Then he turns towards the throne of God and makes this great declaration, "Yahweh, Thou hast put gladness in my heart, More than in the season of the corn and new wine." In a simple state of society, the harvest time was a festival, and the joy of harvest was a symbol of the rich gladness and most exuberant gratitude (Isa. ix. 2). God was recognised as the giver of "natural" blessings, and worship assumed a festive character. But there is a higher joy; though this man has not attained to the deep spirituality of what we call Christian experience, he knows that there is a more permanent sustenance and richer stimulant than that of bread and wine. He claims to have this peace in the midst of conflict, this positive joy in the hour of storm. Religion for him is not mere ritual, it is not negative but a positive inspiring power. So after a hard day and with perhaps a harder one in view to-morrow, he can lie down and sleep. Linguistic usage favours the rendering, "For Thou, Yahweh, makest me to

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dwell in separateness and security." It is uncertain what the aloneness means here, for certainly his is no cloistered life. One thing however is clear, he finds the secret of wholesome sleep in casting his care on God. He lies down and at once falls asleep because there is no need for him to worry when there is a competent watcher (cxxxvii. 1). Happy the man who, after a toilsome troubled day, can meet the dark lonely hours in the spirit of resignation and faith.

CHAPTER XXIV

WORSHIP AND CHARACTER

(Pss. lxxxiv., xv., xxiv., l., xl.)

A GREAT part of the Psalter has no doubt from the first served the purposes of private meditation and prayer, but in no book do we find more enthusiastic celebration of the privileges and joys of public worship. To-day we have the problem, especially in the large centres of population, as to the relation of "the masses" to the public ministrations of the Church. We feel that the neglect of public worship, whether due to the weakness of the Church or the indifference of the people, is a national calamity. This feeling was even more intense in ancient times when the ways of expressing the religious feeling in literature and life were more limited. The public worship in Christian countries stands in close historical relationship to the Jewish Church; in some of our communions the priestly position and the ritualistic splendour remain, while in others the simpler service of psalm-singing and Scripture reading stands nearer to the synagogue than the temple. To us this has become a part of the commonplace routine of religious life, and we seldom reflect upon the long historical process through which the varied forms were evolved, and the symbolism filled with spiritual meaning.

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Psalm lxxxiv. is one of the classic expressions of this joy of worship, a pilgrim psalm with some similarity in style to Ps. xli., xlii., with a less painful personal element but showing the same longing for the temple service, and the same feeling of exaltation at the prospect of reunion with God through the symbols of the Church. When it is said that "throughout this triad of psalms there breathes a blessed intimacy with God not unworthy of the greatest mystics," we must remember that it is a "mysticism," if it can be so called, which has not yet freed itself from the "company" of worshippers and the visible symbols of the Church so as to be absorbed in lonely personal communion. There are difficulties in details of translation, but the spirit of enthusiasm as a refuge for the saint shines out clear and strong. The thought in *v.* 3, which does not come out very clearly in A.V., seems to be that as a bird finds a home for herself, or place of shelter and security for her young, such a home Israel and her children find in the house of God. It is not likely that perfect agreement will be reached as to the translation of *vv.* 5-7; "the highways in their heart" is a peculiar expression, it is suggested that we follow the Greek version in the sense that they set their mind on pilgrimage, or read a slightly different word, "in whose heart there is confidence" (Job. iv. 6). The reference to going up to the temple is attractive in this connection. The Valley of Baca, usually taken to mean Weeping, may mean a dry valley which becomes a place of springs to those who already enjoy a foretaste of the divine presence.

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The pilgrims become stronger as they march, the joy increasing as they approach their goal. As the word "strength" may mean an army, some have found a reference to the fact that the companies of pilgrims grow larger as they move along; others translate "they pass from rampart to rampart," that is, from city to city. The difficulties, interesting to students of the original, do not spoil the picture; it leaves the impression that one day in this hallowed place and sacred company is of incomparable value, and that in those days "the joy of the Lord" which was the strength of the pious, had its central manifestation in the temple.

The heart of the true religion is not found in the splendour of worship, or in its national memories and sacred associations, but in the higher morality, which at this stage this worship called for, and to which it was a stimulus and help. For this we must turn to other songs as xv. and xxiv. to find out what kind of a generation it is that seeks after Him, that seek the face of the God of Jacob (xxiv. 6, R.V. and Greek). In answer to the question "O Yahweh, who shall sojourn in Thy tent, Who shall dwell in Thy holy mount?" we have a picture of an upright man who speaks truth, who is faithful to his fellow-citizen and refrains from slandering his neighbour. This man has reverence for the piety of his fellowmen, keeps his plighted word even when he has to suffer for it; he will not squeeze the poor and will not injure the innocent for the sake of worldly gain. Such a man has character in the real sense, he is not to be easily shaken, for he takes his stand on the law

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of righteousness and on the promise of the God of Israel (cf. Isa. xxxiii. 15 f.). The earlier prophets fought this battle, they set the good life over against the worship of their time as the essence of religion ; after the Exile, the prophets had to be supporters of the Church and their criticism was different in character. Now we have reached a stage when prophetic teaching and public worship are united in the songs of the sanctuary. The question is asked by the choir or a singer.

Who shall ascend unto Yahweh's hill,
And who shall stand in His holy place ?

To this challenge the noble reply is made

He whose hands are clean and his mind pure,
Who has not lifted up his soul to vanity,
He shall bear away a blessing from Yahweh,
And salvation from God who is his help.

The man who is to take away from the sanctuary a real blessing must bring not merely offerings, but a pure receptive mind, that has shown its earnestness of purpose by seeking cleanliness of life and turning from the sensuous attraction of the world and the superstitions of heathen worship. Here then is a union of the temple worship and a high religious morality ; such worship is not a dead form and has passed far beyond the sphere of "magic." The question may then arise, What is the relation of all this to the varied "sacrifices" which formed such an important part of ancient religions, and which remained as an essential element of Judaism until

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the temple was finally destroyed? The answer is that while sacrifice in the literal sense continued to play an important part in the religious life of the Jews, and became symbolic of penitence and forgiveness in the higher sense, the growth of this book, and the thought and emotion that it represents, became a real preparation for the time when such sacrifices would be no longer possible. When men had learned that the broken heart and contrite spirit may itself be a real sacrifice, they were gaining a religion that might live when the temple ritual became impossible.

It may be that Ps. 1. does not rank among the highest in literary originality and prophetic power, and there is a certain ambiguity at the crucial point *v.* 14, which reads in our version "Offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High." We find one scholar translating "Sacrifice thou to God thanksgiving," and another "Sacrifice to Yahweh thank-offering"; also in *v.* 23 "He who sacrifices thanksgiving will honour Me"; and another "Whoso offereth a thank-offering glorifieth Me." But it is recognised that, alongside of the offering, prayer and thanksgiving begin to assume an importance which will by and by enable them to persist and retain their power when the literal sacrifice has passed away, and simply left its traces in figures of speech and symbolic ritual. Before we could speak in the spiritual sense of "sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise," and observe, as some branches of the Church do, "a daily sacrifice," many battles had to be fought

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and earlier stages of thought left behind. This psalm announces the coming of Yahweh to judgment, and calls the saints to renew their solemn vows, and declares distinctly that Yahweh must not be regarded as needing or craving sacrifice for His own support or pleasure. It is admitted that thank-offerings have their place, but the thanks begin to take a more prominent place than the offering. To the true worshipper it is said, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble ; I will deliver thee, and thou shall glorify Me." Then follows a strong statement that implies that the great danger is not the neglect of sacrifices but neglect of instruction and inconsistency of life. So on the whole our poem may be taken as a testimony that legal guidance and moral discipline are beginning to express themselves in the ritual and push into the background the earlier coarse features of the sacrificial system.

Unfortunately, the passage in Ps. xl. 6-8, is not quite clear. The use of it by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. x. 5 ff), based upon the Greek translation, is extremely interesting. There the passage receives a Messianic interpretation, and is used as an illustration of the transition from a lower to a higher kind of sacrifice, "He abolishes the first, that He may establish the second," i.e., in the order of God's providence and in the person of Christ, the sacrifice of obedience takes the place of the literal sacrifice, the symbol passes away and the reality remains. While this is a later interpretation it is in the spirit of the original passage,

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Peace-offering and grain-offering hast Thou no delight in ;
then had I the covenant ;
Whole burnt offering with sin hast Thou not asked ; then didst
Thou command me.
Thee will I delight in, and Thy law is within me.
I have preached righteousness in the great congregation ;
behold my lips. (Briggs.)

This is offered as an amended text and critical translation, but at several points it is uncertain. But even with this drastic treatment, it is evident that the sacrifice of obedience and the law within the heart are given a higher place than material sacrifices. It may not follow that the author undervalues the service of the temple or wishes to abolish sacrifice (*cf.* the striking passage Jer. vii. 21 *ff*) ; but it is one of many indications that a higher element is recognised in the religion of which the literal sacrifices tend to become simply an accompaniment and symbol. Thus do the Psalms appropriate and apply the prophetic teaching, without fierce polemic against sacrifices but with a feeling after something higher. As a matter of fact we all have a limited amount of energy, and a too exclusive attention to an elaborate ritual tends to make religion mechanical and lessen its moral power. Hence our Lord had to denounce the pedantry and formalism which weakened so much the religion of His day. But the fact that Judaism was able to live when the temple was destroyed and exert such a real power in the world is accounted for by the fact that there was in it rich store of intellectual and spiritual elements. We see these

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quietly at work in the Psalter, where worship is the central thought, but where meditation and prayer begin to claim for themselves a real place besides a sacrificial system that became more refined and symbolic.

CHAPTER XXV

THE PENITENTIAL PSALM

(Ps. li.)

THERE are other poems in this collection that the Church has placed in this class,¹ but this is in the supreme sense the psalm of penitence. It claims that position by its own spiritual power and by the sacred associations that have gathered round it in the course of centuries of deepening experience. When we come to the question of the exact situation and attitude of its author we meet with different suggestions. That the psalm is later than the Exile is now generally accepted, but this does not mean that perfect agreement as to its interpretation has been reached, or as to the relation of the conclusion to the body of the poem. There are also questions of translation that require attention before one can form a final judgment. One thing we may be thankful for, that is, that while a critical investigation may throw light on the development of the Israelite religion and satisfy our desire to get a little nearer to the exact thought of the ancient saints to whom we owe so much, it can never alter the fact that wherever Christian men have struggled with the mystery and burden of sin this psalm has served to express their deepest desires, and to preach,

¹ vi., xxxii, xxxviii, cii., cxxx., cxliii.

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even if in language of the ritual, a spiritual religion. That fact ought not to influence us in any wrong way, but it certainly does make us feel that some of the explanations proposed are rather chilling, so that in coming nearer to this religious classic we have the sense of being freed from an illusion.

The collective interpretation that presents it as a prayer of the Jewish Church in the time of Nehemiah and that the concluding words are real, not ideal, prayer seems to rob the psalm of its deep personal power and show that it made no contribution to the deepening of individual spiritual experience. To make the poet say in one verse that Yahweh does not delight in peace offerings, and in the next that if He will only build the walls of Jerusalem, then He will delight in the same peace-offerings leaves us in a state of confusion. On the other hand the reminder of those who take the personal view that the man has not reached the Christian's position in his estimation of sacrifice and his doctrine of retribution, may be useful, but it need not lead us to deny to him something of "the prophetic spirit." It is true that there was now a thoughtful class of men who could not allow temple and sacrifice to have a monopoly of sanctity; pious meditation and penitent prayer were also high religious exercises, and through them man could approach his God. This prepared the way for a religion that could live without the temple, but in the meantime it might also purify the temple worship. The dominant Jewish view of the connection between sin and suffering can no doubt be traced here, but it is not the most prominent

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thing ; as we read the psalm as a whole the impression that it leaves on the mind is that of a soul struggling with a sense of sin and longing for a deeper communion with God. After a critical examination of each phrase, we may still find ourselves in harmony with a recent scholar when he says, " Ps. li. is the purest and sublimest of the penitential psalms and alongside of Ps. lxxiii. the most powerful witness to the ethical spiritual height to which the revelation of God given in Israel could by the purifying power of prophetic preaching exalt the pious. Here we stand on a lonely height, high above the lowlands, on which the masses in Israel and Judah were for the most part wont to move, and breathe the pure air of evangelical piety." If that takes us in the concluding sentence a little too far, it simply shows that the poem still has power to move keen intellects to sincere enthusiasm and high appreciation. Let us then note briefly the points in debate, and then sum up the dominant message of the poem.

What is meant by the statement, " That Thou mayest be justified when Thou speakest, etc. " ? We are not concerned here to investigate the New Testament form or use of the passage, which is based upon mistranslations in the Greek version, " And mightest prevail when Thou *art judged*." This has been taken to mean that the purpose of Israel's sin was the proof of God's righteousness in His judgment of sin, or in other words that God is glorified through men's sin. This leads to subtle theological questions of free will and responsibility, and it is very doubtful whether these were in the minds of

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the writer. It has been suggested that the original order was "For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me; that Thou mayest be justified when Thou speakest, etc." Then the connection is that the confession is made for the purpose of recognising God's righteous judgment. It is possible that this is the meaning in any case, and that we need not consider the fact that, in Hebrew, the *result* is often put as if it were the *purpose*, or involve ourselves in a metaphysical discussion that had not yet made its appearance.

There is some doubt about the rendering of the verse, "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts, And in the inward part Thou shall make me to know wisdom." Here we have a striking contrast (*vv.* 5, 6, in English) which confronts us with its sharp demand for inward purity on the part of one who was born in iniquity and conceived in sin:— a powerful statement which has often reminded us of the immense distance between the actual and ideal condition of human nature. The difficulty in the text makes it impossible to be quite certain as to its original form; it seems likely that the meaning is that God approves of frank open confession, "Thou lovest truth rather than concealment, and teachest me to know hidden wisdom," the "hidden wisdom" in that case being the connection between suffering and sin (*Job xi. 6*), that suffering is a reminder of sin and a call for confession (*Ps. xxxii.*). Another proposal is,

Behold in faithfulness Thou dost delight,
The confidence of wisdom Thou makest me to know.

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Here we have to go back to the speech of God (*v.* 4), which is supposed to refer to the words of the Law, and so what is commended is Israel's confidence in the divine wisdom. It seems to be a more artificial explanation. In *v.* 8 one ancient text has, instead of "Make me to hear," "Satisfy me with joy and gladness"; this may easily be the correct reading as the two Hebrew words are similar, and it is preferable for those who follow the personal interpretation. "Right" spirit in *v.* 10 means a firm, steadfast spirit; "free" spirit in *v.* 12 suggests a spirit of willingness on the part of the man, though some refer it as "generous and princely" to the guiding spirit of God. "Bloodguiltiness," literally *blood*, is now generally regarded as a prayer to be saved, not from committing murder, or from the guilt of one already committed, but to be delivered from death or destruction (*cf.* xxx., 9; "silence" is suggested, a similar word used in this connection xciv. 17; cxv. 17) — in this case the destruction of Israel or the death of the poet as the result of the sickness by which he has been stricken. When we consider these results of the criticism of a piece of Hebrew writing that has come from a period considerably more than two thousand years ago, we may congratulate ourselves that a noble poem has been so well preserved.

The poet speaks to us of sin, the deepest mystery of human life; he speaks in the language of the ritual, though he is far from being a ritualist in any shallow sense. In the words that he uses he gives specific aspects of the thing that we call "sin." It

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is a *record* that stands against one in the book of remembrance (Numb. v. 23). It can only be cleared away by the free forgiveness of God. "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake" (Isa. xliii. 25). It is a stain, a defilement from which the soul needs to be cleansed. The word "cleansed" is a ceremonial term, common in the latest legal code, a man thus cleansed is not only restored to the divine favour, but he may take his part in the life of the religious community. In the old world certain defilements separated a man from acts of worship, by their influence he was for the time being "excommunicated." These were definite, specific things that had in some cases connected a man with foreign worships or alien customs. These things are in the background now, but they give a suggestion as to the power of wickedness to unfit a man for real friendship and communion with the society that is based on goodness. "Take sin away from me with hyssop" is a symbolical use of the ritual language (Lev. xiv., Numb. xix.). Isaiah, even when denouncing excess of ritual, could cry "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes" (Isa. i. 16), and our poet certainly would not be content with ceremonial ablutions and ritualistic purifications. These varied symbols of sin save it from becoming a theological abstraction, about which a man can talk glibly as if it had no relation to himself. Here it is the weakness and impurity which a man shares with all human creatures; it defiles him, hampers his attempts at worship, haunts him as a ghost from the grim past.

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We should like to know exactly how the man can say that he has sinned against God alone, and what specific form the evil took that he did against God. He may have felt sincerely that he could look his fellowmen in the face but that in the presence of a God of purity he was overwhelmed by a sense of weakness and shame. He does not cast his blame upon others, it is not as an excuse that he declares that even from birth he was unclean. Of "original sin" in the later sense or of "heredity" in the modern view he does not speak explicitly; he is simply making a statement that he is involved in the common lot and has not conquered his weakness so as to show faithfulness before his God.

"Take not Thy holy spirit from me" is a new prayer. Only in one other place does the phrase "holy spirit" occur (Isa. lxiii. 10 f) where it is used of the divine manifestation at the time of the Exodus. Here it is parallel to the divine presence which is revealed to the acceptable worshipper. The prayer has not the depth that it has since received under the influence of Christian teaching. The adjective "holy" in this connection may be another instance of priestly influence, but the man who had pondered the prophetic utterance concerning the wonderful power of Yahweh's spirit may have longed for personal guidance and spiritual equipment from the same spirit (Isa. xlii. 1; lxi. 1).

We come, then, to the conclusion that while the psalm is a later product of Jewish religion and expressed its great thoughts in the vocabulary of the temple worship, it has a spirituality of tone that

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justifies the position that it has claimed and maintained in the world's religious literature. If it was by affliction that the sense of unworthiness, failure, and helplessness was awakened in the writer, that was a religious use of sorrow and a case of self-judgment of which there is no need to be ashamed. The hard dogma that suffering in every case is the punishment of sin, had in it an element of truth, and exerted its evil power when it was used by self-satisfied people to torture their unfortunate fellow men. It is good that suffering should lead a man to cast himself in submission before the throne of God. This man has learned that sin is a many-sided thing, and he applies the lash to himself. Not from any analysis of himself, or mortification of his soul, does he expect deliverance, but only from the free mercy of a loving God. He does not make a religion out of sorrow; he knows that life is joyful, and so he is not afraid to pray for joy. He could not conquer completely the atmosphere of his time in which the afflicted man was regarded as God-forsaken; he longed for restoration to health and happiness as a proof to the world and himself of God's favour. But he looks further than this; the restored strength and renewed joy is to be used in service. He can then speak from living experience and be in the true sense a teacher of righteousness. True we can find these great evangelical ideas in Deutero-Isaiah, given in a noble historical setting, but they needed to be appropriated by individual Jews and turned into the language of prayer for common men. We cannot, either, claim absolute originality for him in the great thought that

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crowns his prayer, that the true sacrifice is a broken and contrite heart. It had been declared long before that obedience is better than sacrifice and that Yahweh desired mercy and not sacrifice. Doubtless many men had meditated on this subject, when in a foreign land and far from the temple. Such revelations come in flashes to prepared souls, but they take time to work into the heart of the community and have their true meaning fully appreciated. It is only through sharp experience that the highest truths are really learned. This saying that God Himself will regard sincere and intelligent penitence as the highest and most acceptable sacrifice still stands as one of the highest words of faith.

CHAPTER XXVI

ADVANCED THEOLOGY AND STERN TEMPER

(Ps. cxxxix.)

THIS Psalm bears the title of " David " in the Hebrew, but it is evident that the poem is neither by David nor about David ; and it is not even likely that it was in an early " Davidic " collection. Some Greek manuscripts have " Zechariah in the dispersion." These are but specimens of ancient Jewish scholarship interesting in their way, but, like much of our own scholarship, not convincing or authoritative. There is no need to argue this question here further than to say that both the language and the theology point to a quite late period. If we did not know anything about " David," that, as well as any other Hebrew name, might be the name of the author. But when we think of the King of Israel we know something about his times and his theology. He thought that to be banished from Hebrew territory was to be driven from the presence and worship of his God, while the writer of this poem knows that nowhere in the wide world is there escape from the Divine Presence (1 Sam. xxvi. 19). We know the primitive beliefs that were current in early Israel, and

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they are remote from this intellectual presentation of Yahweh's power and character. Centuries before this psalm was written, men believed in the supreme power of the God of Israel, but the manner of thinking and stating it was as far from the style of our poet as he is from the scholastic Calvinism of Christian times.

One modern scholar has found in the psalm three separate poems belonging to different periods, all of them, however, are "didactic." That kind of criticism seems to err on the side of "vigour and rigour," and as some of the keenest critics maintain its substantial unity we need not scruple, for our present purpose, to treat it as a whole. It is not in the strictest sense a song or hymn, though it is a reverent meditation on the nature of God and closes with a personal prayer. It belongs to the literature of reflection which we find in Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. It deals with a problem, but not with the problem of suffering (see lxxiii.) discussed with such passion and power in Job. It is calm in its theology and is not tormented by the restless scepticism of Ecclesiastes. It is not, however, abstract theology; the man is not concerned with "attributes" as mere intellectual labels, but with God's presence and power as it affects himself. Thus there is mysticism mingled with the intellectualism. We are constantly reminded that the Hebrews were intensely practical, but here we have an approach to philosophy. We have a view of the world with God at the centre and with no limits to His presence. Though the name "Yahweh," the name of Israel's

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God, is used, we are far from any conception of a mere tribal God. Greek influence may have already made itself felt in Judæa, but if so, it only stimulated the Jew to express a little more explicitly what was already involved in his native creed. The world, even of this thinker, is smaller and less complex than ours, but it is a world pervaded by the Divine Presence, controlled and guided by the Divine Wisdom. A living religion must attain to a great theology or die. At the present time we live within the framework of a complicated social structure which has taken centuries to grow, and we are apt to become mere parts of a great machine. When the routine is broken by the crushing weight of sorrow, or the presence of a world catastrophe, we are led to ask whether we have any "theology," any comprehensive view of life and history. In the Psalms we meet a living God controlling the world, guiding history, hearing prayers, granting blessings. Can this simple faith survive the influence of "culture" or are we driven back to a blind fatalism? Our soul can be saved in spite of the increase of machinery, if we can still maintain the sense of wonder, reverence and trust that give life to this poet's theology. It does not occur to him to argue that there is a God, he finds himself compassed about by a Presence from which the soul cannot escape.

Men speak sometimes of "the practice of the presence of God" and no doubt that conventional phrase had originality and power to the man who invented it. In loneliness and retreats, we are to turn from distraction and seek to realise the nearness

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of the God whom we have forgotten in our pursuit of things. True, but here is a man who starts out with the fact that he is confronted by the presence of God, that is the one presence from which he cannot flee. He gives us high knowledge of God, but he begins by meditating upon God's knowledge of himself. He is not directly thinking of man's littleness in the face of such a mystery (Ixiii. 4), he is not haunted and oppressed as by a tragic fact (Job. vii. 17), he is filled with reverent wonder. God searches and so comes to know him perfectly; marks all the movements of his life, at home or abroad, knows his companions, anticipates his speech, compasses him round about, lays upon him the pressure of a restraining hand. This significant fact does not paralyse his soul, though it crushes his conceit. What a good thing for a man to be in the presence of spiritual reality, in which he believes but cannot comprehend! The more our knowledge grows, the more does mystery encompass us.

Too wonderful for me is such knowledge;
It is high, I cannot attain unto it.

But thought still has its work to do; it cannot compass and comprehend, but it can appreciate the reality and with poetic power pursue the high theme.

There is the threefold presentation of the mystery—the all-pervading nature of this mystic presence, the wonder of life in its secret origin, the action of this strange knowledge on the destiny of man. There is no escape from the Presence, the loftiest height and deepest depth, the extremes of East and West are

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not beyond its range. Darkness cannot hide from One who carries the light with Him. There was a time when "the spirit of Yahweh" was an energy coming in fitful bursts or strange flashes, bringing a brief enthusiasm or a temporary vision; here it is what we would call a "cosmic" influence pervading all spheres of nature and of life. Once Sheol was a dark place outside of Yahweh's Kingdom; now the divine rays penetrate the abyss. Surely this theology quivers with a life that unites intellect and heart.

The mystery of the growth of this human body, and its preparation for the spirit that moves it was a manifestation of the divine power and wisdom. Little probably does this man know of biology or embryology, but of this he is sure, that the secret process of growth before the babe comes to birth, the first stage in a man's earthly career, is guided by Him who is the Lord of life. We speak of life that weaves for itself an appropriate form; to him life is only another name for God. God does not wait until we can seek or pray; before we can do anything at all He is there, weaving the strange fabric of our body; it is this knowledge that makes us what we are.

We are not here plunged into speculations concerning "free will and fate," but predestination is clearly asserted. His destiny was foreseen and his days written, preordained in God's book before they came into existence. This type of theology has exerted tremendous power in the world (cf. Jer. i. 4). Looked at from the outside it may seem mechanical and fatalistic, but no theology should be judged in that way. The men who have made history, the

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men who have been remarkable for their incessant activity, who have done heroic things in spite of personal weakness and adverse circumstances, were the men who believed in "destiny" in an intelligent and noble sense. To feel that the God who shaped the structure of our bodies, and imparted to us something of His own knowledge, also guides our life is to have a creative living faith.

Advanced theology is supposed to consort with lack of fervour and zeal. That may be so in comfortable times, when theology is a luxurious speculation rather than the very breath of one's life. A knowledge of history and of the various shades of thought should indeed make one sympathetic and charitable towards various stages of religious culture. But the charity that rests on indifference is a poor thing. The most difficult combination is strength of conviction with kindly sympathy. Here we meet with what seems a fanatical outburst against the enemies of God. It is possible, too, that those denounced so fiercely are members of the Jewish community, and not the persecuting heathen. It may be that the words were written in the Maccabean period, when many Jews were led astray by the fascination of new fashions, and by forms of religion that appealed to the senses with bewitching power. What sympathy can a man of this stamp have with such weakness? To a man who can reach such a lofty height of faith these vain shows were contemptible; they were that from any intelligent human point of view, but in this light of eternity they were acts of rebellion, treachery against the eternal king. This is not

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Christian, we may say, but how human it is ; it is illustrated by many of the most tragic pages of human history. Toleration of the real kind is evidently a difficult achievement ; the indifferent or the patronising kind may easily be attained and is not worth having. This man hates the enemies of Yahweh with a perfect hatred, and counts them as his own enemies. " Perfect hatred " even in an intelligent man, consumed with zeal for a high religion, may work mischief. We cannot doubt this man's intelligence ; we have felt the power of his devotion ; but now we are confronted by the fact that he is carried away by passionate hatred when he thinks of unbelievers. It is all so clear to him, they have no excuse ; it is all due to their own wicked perversity. He can speak in these terms and yet in all sincerity he can say, " Search me, O God, and know my heart . . . and see if there be any wicked way in me." It is quite easy for us standing at the Christian point of view, to see that this man comes short of the perfect way, and that his method of ending wickedness by having God slaughter the wicked, is both crude and futile. But when we ask how far we have been successful in bringing Christian principles into control of our own life, especially in its relation to sectarian and racial differences, then we have little cause for pride. Not by fire and sword can the power of true religion conquer society ; that method has been tried and failed. Practically all religions and sects have tried it ; our own Puritans were in their own way as stern as the Jewish zealots. To combine " sweetness and light " with clear

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convictions and passionate earnestness is the achievement of a few noble souls, and if our poet is not one of these, he failed because he did not see the full significance of his own teaching concerning the old pervading presence of the one true God.

CHAPTER XXVII

GOD SAVE THE KING

(Pss. xx., xxi.)

A CERTAIN number of the poems in this collection are usually classed as "royal psalms." Among these are sometimes included such psalms as lxi. and lxiii., in which there is simply an allusion to or prayer for the King, as well as ii., xx., xxi., lxxii., etc., which deal more fully with the life and position of the King present or future. Ps. xlv. which sets forth the marriage of the King and celebrates the splendours of the bride is now pretty generally regarded as a "secular" poem belonging to the class of love-lyrics found in Canticles, though this also later received a Messianic application. In ci., it is highly probable that we have the prayer of a king or ruler, and that he is represented as declaring the principles of piety on which he will base the ordering of his house and the government of his people. He will encourage the company of "the faithful in the land," and will "morning by morning" destroy the wicked of the land, he "will cut off from the city of Yahweh all the workers of iniquity." This does not need special discussion here, as it simply represents the ideal of Jewish piety of that period as enthroned and energetic in the present. With regard to cx. we may

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say that, striking and suggestive as it appears in the English version, the text is in part so uncertain as to require a more critical treatment than can be given in a slight sketch. In lxxxix. and cxxxii. the rich promises, "the sure mercies" sworn to David are made the basis of prayers and hopes for the present :

His seed shall endure for ever,
And his throne as the sun before me,
And it shall be established for ever as the moon,
And as the faithful witness in the sky (lxxxix. 36, 37).
He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father,
My God and the rock of my salvation.
I will also make him my first-born,
The highest of the kings of the earth (26, 27).

Such words no doubt blend into one expression the memories of the golden days of the past, so richly celebrated in song and story, and the hopes of a still greater future. It is difficult to fix the precise date of these "royal psalms" and in some cases to decide the question whether a particular poem refers to an actual present ruler or to a future ideal king. But we can see that this idea of kingship, which plays a real part in history and prophecy, must take its place in the realm of sacred song. In 1 Sam. x. 24, we are told that the people when they believed that they had found a noble champion cried "God save the King" (literally, Let the King live, Vive le Roi) and in Ps. xx. 10, the better translation is "Yahweh save the King, And answer us (now) when we cry." This is the rendering of the Greek and Latin versions; it involves no serious change, merely a different division which gives a better parallelism. This

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prayer of the people is an application of the confidence expressed in *v.* 6. "Now I know that Yahweh saveth His anointed, He will hear him from His holy heaven." On the whole, the text is well preserved, so that there are few textual difficulties. The phrase "we will set up our banners" in *v.* 5 is rather uncertain and it is possible we should read *we shall be magnified* (Greek) or *we will magnify the name of our God*. It is probable that this psalm, like the following one, is liturgical; in the one case intercession and in the other thanksgiving is offered on behalf of the King who is the chief servant of God and the supreme leader of the people. In *xx.* 1-5, we have the prayer for the King's success uttered before the sacrifice is offered, that there may be deliverance from danger, acceptance of the sacrifice now presented, and granting of his heart's desire; 6-8 opens with a note of confidence "Now I know that Yahweh will surely save His anointed." It has been conjectured that here the name of the King may have followed, but that is uncertain. The great thought of this passage is that the hope of success is based not merely upon the acceptance of the sacrifice, but also upon the fact that their supreme trust is in their God and not in worldly weapons. Meeting the statement that this expression presupposes a time when Israel had no army, one expositor (Baethgen) says, "We Germans sing:

' Not horses, not warriors, secure the steep height where
Princes stand,
Love of Fatherland, love of the free man, established in the
Rulers' throne, like a rock in the sea,'

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and yet the one who is thus addressed commands from two to three million soldiers." Without discussing modern militarism we may note the fact that both the prophets and the later religious teachers of Israel saw clearly that great increase in the destructive equipment and gorgeous trappings of war tended to make men arrogant and forgetful of God. Some of these teachers may have had a narrow outlook and have expected supernatural help in a mechanical fashion, but the great prophets were striving after the truth that social righteousness and national humility would tend both towards peace and prosperity. Then in *v.* 9, comes the prayer of the people which corresponds to our patriotic petition, "God save the King."

In *xxi.* the tone is that of thanksgiving for the past and confidence for the future :

The King shall joy in Thy strength, O Yahweh ;
And in Thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice !
Thou hast given him his heart's desire,
And hast not withholden the request of his lips.

This may have been on a birthday or coronation festival or after some great victory. We have no proof, however, that king's birthdays were celebrated in Israel, though such is said to have been an Egyptian custom. The prominent thought here is that the rich blessings enjoyed by the King were the gift of God. The crown of pure gold, the long and prosperous reign are signs of God's presence and favour.

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Great is his glory through Thy help,
Honour and majesty Thou hast laid upon him.
For Thou hast made him most blessed for ever,
Thou hast made him exceeding glad with Thy
countenance.

This gladness in the presence of Yahweh means the festival joy, the time of rejoicing at the sanctuary and in the act of worship where the king appears as representative of the nation. We do not know what king was first referred to in these glowing words, but it seems clear that their setting is in actual history, and not in the first place a Messianic prophecy.

“ Life he asked of Thee, and Thou gavest it to him,
Even length of days for ever and ever.”

(cf. lxi. 6, 7 ; 1 Kings i. 31.)

Such language, natural as it was to the oriental poet, in later times easily gained a Messianic significance and was applied to the ideal King. In the Old Testament, as well as in Babylonian psalms, there is “ court language,” though the attitude of the Israelites did not come so near to actual worship of the earthly ruler.

The second part of the psalm, vv. 8-12, is a direct address to the King and in words which breathe the fierce spirit of *ancient* (is it necessary now to add that word?) war predicts the complete destruction of his enemies. “ Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth, and their seed from among the children of men.” “ Baby-killing ” was a regular feature of war in those days (Ps. cxxxvii.). Of course it is impossible to destroy a whole people ; Jews,

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Poles, Armenians and others that have been subject to "massacres" have shown remarkable persistence and vitality, but whole families and tribes have been blotted out by the cruel policy that had behind it the belief that the evil to be destroyed was something clinging to the very flesh and blood of the enemy. It has been suggested that the reference here is to internal discord and not to a foreign campaign; and, while that is mere conjecture resting on a very late date of the Psalm and deriving its illustration from the fact that Alexander Jannaeus caused wives and children to be slain before the eyes of the crucified Pharisees, yet the principle is true that wars between dynasties, families, and closely related sects have been of the most cruel type. The thing that should perplex and shame us now, is not the difficulty of reconciling such fiery hatred of enemies with inspiration of the words by a loving God, but the fact that after a higher inspiration has been working in the world so long, and the ideal of brotherhood has been clearly seen, there should be a breakdown of human relations involving tragedies before which the petty struggles of former days seem insignificant.

It is not, however, on the Old Testament teaching as to peace and war that these psalms call upon us to dwell, but rather the position of kingship in Israel. We do not regard the Bible as a political text-book, but we must confess that it has mightily influenced the politics of the English-speaking race. Our theologians have carried on learned and bitter discussions concerning "the divine right of kings"

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and the position due to "the Lord's anointed." Now such discussions are for us largely "academic," as the essential part of that controversy has been settled. But it is well to remind ourselves that it is a living question in the larger world and that our own life has been influenced by the attitude and teaching of the Bible.

The following words from a scholar in whose land we believe the kingship is too highly exalted, may be quoted in regard to the old position: "In every ancient monarchical state the ruler was admired as the elect of God, and, to protect him in his dangerous position, considered as consecrated to the Deity. In all the royal sanctuaries of the ancient East, there were petitions and oracles concerning the King. We still know the psalm of Assurbanipal, King of Assyria, where the Assyrian King assures the god Nebo that his trust is in him alone and entreats him, 'Leave me not in the midst of mine enemies.' The god then answers him through the mouth of his priest that his prayer is heard, 'I will protect thee to all eternity, thy feet shall not grow lame, thy hands shall not be weary, thine enemies shall pass away as salt before the water; because thou hast trusted me, and in the assemblies of all gods hast declared my praise.' Also we have here the peculiar exchange from the tone of prayer to the divine oracle, which is characteristic of Ps. xx. and therefore was customary in such psalms. The great distinction between the Assyrian and the Israelite poems consists specially in the fact that the former presupposes polytheism."

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We have every reason to be glad on account of the tone of the Biblical psalms. Although the poem was sung in the presence of the King, and of men who ate at the King's table, it contains no eulogy, no flattery, the King is not the highest, but he knows One who is more than king and gives the glory to God alone ; the song of victory which he promises shall praise God and " the help " of God. The poet is therefore kept by his piety from glorifying the King too much. He finds a somewhat more " heathenish " tone in Ps. xlv. and continues : " The deification of the King which was at home in the ancient East since primitive times would have been an abomination to this pious man." " Also the pious of our day feel themselves with good right called to pray for the King with the psalmist, that the Almighty may protect him in his high and dangerous office ; in a monarchical state the Christian can be nothing else than loyal to the King. At the same time, religious people will do well to learn from the restraint of the Israelite singer, that the worship of God and the dutiful honouring of the King are to be distinguished, religion is infinitely more than loyalty to the King."

This is not the place to discuss the merits of any particular form of government, or to review the battles that religious men have fought against royal tyranny and for liberty. The men of our race who made the most heroic efforts in this direction believed that they had the Bible and the God of the Bible as the source of their inspiration and strength. Israel also was one of the small nations that fought for freedom and refused to be drilled into slavery

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though it submitted to the yoke of the divine Law. If we may free such terms from modern associations we may say that it passed through democracy, monarchy, and theocracy. There were the days of tribalism when the strong man who commended himself to the people came to the front, the period when union was sought and only temporarily gained by monarchy, and when, later, princes of the Church held sway. They were mostly turbulent times, when the spirit of faction prevailed and the political problems which we have not completely solved were beginning to be dimly discerned. In the great Babylonian empire, where there was a more highly organised social life, and a more brilliant military power, the divine right of the King seems to have had a scientific and theological basis in the belief that the order of things on earth corresponded to the order of things in the heavens and the king stood in the supreme central place as a God. The living story of Israel's history unfolded in the Old Testament shows here as elsewhere a living movement. When the kingship was founded, there was difference of opinion as to its nature and advisability; when Solomon put too great a strain upon it, revolt and division came. The comparative stability of the Davidic dynasty in Judah served a great purpose and made it possible for the two names David and Jerusalem to become the symbols of true kingship, and the eternal city of God. The book of Kings is on the whole a book of judgment on kings who had failed to reach the religious ideal. The two important passages, Deut. xvii., 1 Sam. viii., show that the

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religious teachers of that day were alive to the dangers of selfish arrogance and oppression, that have marked the rule of most oriental kings. They could not work out the problems of constitutional freedom or discuss the questions concerning God and Cæsar that had not yet arisen, but they refused to make a God of the King, they fought against tyranny, and believed that "the Lord's anointed" was subject to the laws of truth and honesty which bind the common man; they advocated trust in righteousness rather than in armaments, and it was as much with honour to God as loyalty to the King that they cried "God save the King."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MESSIANIC KING

(Psalm lxxii.)

THIS poem is in its English form a highly attractive one and has been thoroughly appropriated by the Church in metrical versions and in the well-known Christian hymn

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun,
Doth his successive journeys run.

When, however, we come to close quarters with the Hebrew original, we find textual and critical problems that are not easily solved. In *v. 1* we should no doubt follow the Greek, which has the singular form "justice", a prayer to Yahweh that the King may possess "justice" and "righteousness" as the qualities of his rule, so that he may exercise the office of an upright judge and be in that way a defender of the needy. Then follows a poetic prayer that the mountains may bear peace, and the hills righteousness to the people as a result of this noble reign. Whether justice is represented as fruit growing out of a well governed land (*Isa. xxxii. 17*), or that the messengers of the resultant peace came across the mountains, is uncertain. If we are to be guided by parallelism and metrical structure, the words "And shall break in pieces the oppressor"

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must be regarded as a marginal addition. *V.* 5 should probably read

May he prolong his days as long as the sun,
And before (in presence of) the moon throughout all
generations.

Instead of "they that dwell in the wilderness" we should read "his adversaries." In *v.* 15 a better sense is given by the translation "May he (*v.* 3 the King) live and may there be given to him of the gold of Sheba: And may prayer be made for him continually." As a specimen of uncertainty in details the English version of *v.* 16 may be given with two attempts at critical revision.

There shall be an abundance of corn in the earth upon the top
of the mountains,
The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon ;
And they of the city shall flourish like grass of the field.

May there be (an aftergrowth) in the land ; on the top of the
mountains (sheep),
(Kine) on Lebanon ; and may flowers blossom (out of the forest)
as herbs of the field.

Let there be corn enough in the land,
Sufficient pasture on the tops of the mountains ;
Before him (the King) let there be the offspring of the body,
Fruit (of the body) as the vegetation of the field.

The ordinary reader will naturally infer from this either that Hebrew is a peculiar language, or that the text is in poor condition.

When we turn to the critical problem in the larger sense, it seems evident that *vv.* 18, 19, are a closing doxology probably added at a later time than the composition of the earliest part of the psalm,

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Blessed be Yahweh the God of Israel,
Who only doeth wondrous things ;
And blessed be His glorious name for ever,
And let the whole earth be filled with His glory,

while *v.* 20 is a note stating that this is the conclusion, so far as the editor knows, of the book of prayers by David the son of Jesse. We do not lose anything distinctive by recognising this fact, as such doxologies are common in the sacred books. But it is probable that a still further division has to be made in what we have left. The keenest scholars have come to the conclusion that the poem has passed through two stages ; it is a royal psalm which by the addition of certain verses has received a Messianic application. There is not absolute agreement on this point whether the later verses are 8-11, 5-11, or 8-12, but there is good reason for thinking that there are two strata in the poem, the original prayer for the King, and the later application to the ideal King. This is a quite natural and living process, and it did not stop there, in later literature the dominion of the Messiah was extended beyond the regions mentioned here. The royal psalm shows the prophetic spirit, it breathes to heaven fervent prayer for the King, desiring for him the richest earthly prosperity, but this in order that he may fill his high office as a defender of the poor. May he have pity on the poor and weak and remember that the poor are souls or persons that he ought to save. This ideal of kingship has in our lands to be carried out in constitutional ways, but it is still an ideal of good government which needs for its full realisation the spirit of religion

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as well as the wisdom of political economy. The specially Messianic part of the psalm in the R.V. reads as follows :

They shall fear Thee while the sun endureth,
And as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass :
As showers that water the earth.
In his days shall the righteous flourish
And abundance of peace, till the moon be no more.
He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,
And from the River unto the ends of the earth
They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him,
And his enemies shall lick the dust.
The kings of Tarshish and the isles shall bring presents,
The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.
Yea all kings shall fall down before him :
All nations shall serve him.

It is evident that this is a prophecy of universal dominion for a future king of Israel, who, as the representative of Yahweh, is to rule over other kings and nations as well as over his own people. In that sense it is Messianic though the name Messiah is not used. It links itself naturally to the glorification of Israel's king, and the noble ideas of kingship as God's means of bringing righteousness on the earth and securing protection for the poor. It is not necessary to attempt here even a brief discussion of Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament in general, but simply to point out that while the Psalter is not the place to look for theological theories, or definite predictions, its prayers and hymns move in the atmosphere of faith and expectation which is so to speak the home of the Messianic hope. When

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disappointed and persecuted, saints clung to the faith that only from God could come the decisive judgment and real deliverance: this hope, drawing its colours from the past, became more clear, definite and personal. Though the psalmists did not create this particular style of religious hope, they kept it alive in the spirit of prayer. "Yahweh, how long?" was a frequent cry that rose to heaven and meant "How long before Thou wilt come in judgment to deliver the meek and set up a kingdom in righteousness?" Faith asserts that the meek shall inherit the earth because that must be the will of God.

In speaking of Old Testament scriptures the term "Messianic" is often used of passages where faith in a future time of peace and blessedness is expressed, even though no king or mediator is mentioned, e.g., Isa. ii. 1-4, and in this sense the Psalter is rich in triumphant declarations that the present confusion and strife cannot be God's last word to His people. These glowing words of hope and golden pictures of a better day stand alongside of the bitterest lamentations and sharpest denunciations of evil-doers.

But I am poor and sorrowful.
Let Thy salvation, O God, set me up on high.
I will praise the name of God with a song,
And will magnify Him with thanksgiving.
And it shall please Yahweh better than an ox,
Or a bullock that has horns and hoofs.
The meek have seen it, and are glad ;
Ye that seek after God, let your heart live.
For Yahweh heareth the needy,
And despiseth not His prisoners.

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Let heaven and earth praise Him,
The seas and everything that moveth therein.
For God will save Zion, and build the cities of Judah ;
And they shall abide therein, and have it in possession.
The seed also of His servants shall inherit it,
And they that love His name shall dwell therein.

(lxix. 29-36.)

This represents the spirit in which the psalmists meet national disappointment and social disorder, applying the great faith gained through centuries of toil that their God is the God of the world, that their beloved city must remain the centre of the world's religious life, and that the promises to David and his house await a still richer fulfilment. But while many of the psalms have received in the New Testament a Messianic interpretation of the personal kind, this has to be explained in most cases from the Christian point of view, which had been prepared for by the advance of thought in the meantime, and not from the standpoint of the original writer (cf. Chap. XVI.). The Son of God, the ideal son of man, was rightly regarded as fulfilling in His own person attributes and hopes which were at first used in a more general sense (cf. Chap. XII). The Hebrew word "Messiah" (anointed), which in its Greek form Christ has become so familiar and dear to us, is not applied in the Psalter nor indeed elsewhere in the Old Testament to the ideal King of the future. It is used of kings and priests as anointed of God for a special purpose, even of a foreign king, as Cyrus of Persia. The reference in Dan. ix. 26, may be to the cutting off of the high priest by Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian tyrant. But in the psalms of

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Solomon, representing the views of the early Pharisees we meet the title "Lord Christ," and "Christ" is used probably for the first time clearly of the future personal deliverer. It is not yet the divine Christ, but both the King and the Kingdom are beginning to break away in some measure from the thought of political aggression and worldly conquest. One of the most important of these psalms (xvii.) begins with these words :

O Lord, Thou art our King henceforth and even for evermore,
for in Thee, O God, our soul exulteth.

And what is the time of man's life upon the earth ?

Even according to the measure of his time, so is his hope in him,
But as for us, we will hope in God, our Saviour, for the might
of our God endureth unto everlasting with mercy.

And the Kingdom of God is unto everlasting over the heathen
in judgment.

Thou, O God, didst choose David to be King over Israel, and
Thou didst swear unto him touching his seed for-
ever, that his kingdom should not fail before Thee.

After describing the unfaithfulness of the rulers,
and the sufferings of the people, the writer prays :

Behold, O Lord, and raise up to them their King, the son
of David, in the time when Thou O God, knowest that he
may reign over Israel Thy servant.

And gird him with strength that he may break in pieces
them that rule unjustly.

Then follows a statement of the work to be done by
this ideal King, who is to "destroy the ungodly
nations with the word of his mouth, so that at his
rebuke the nations may flee before him, and he shall
convert sinners in the thoughts of their hearts."
He is to "purge Jerusalem and make it holy, even as

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it was in the days of old " ; then comes this striking statement, " And there shall be no iniquity in his days in their midst, for all shall be holy and their king is the Lord Messiah." We cannot here discuss the exact origin and meaning of this striking title, but it is clear that in these late psalms a future king is looked for, who shall deliver his people from oppression and rule not by brute force, but by the power of character. One more great disappointment had helped men to learn the lesson that a poor, persecuted people, after military success, may become insolent and arrogant, unfit to represent the religion for which their fathers had suffered and died. And so the Messianic hope grows in richness and strength, through the gracious guidance of God, and the bitter experience of men. Based upon that hope that springs eternal in the human breast, quickened and sustained by divine promises, drawing its imagery from golden days of the past—themselves largely the creation of faith and poetry, it refuses to believe that any disappointment is final, it keeps its face steadily towards the future. Surely this is one of God's great gifts to humanity though the Hebrew race and their literature. This hope is not a mechanical rigid thing, it is alive with the passion and patience of many generations ; in our Christ we have one who interprets the past and makes the future to be full of promise, so that our enlarged experience throws new wealth of thought and feeling into the prayer " Thy Kingdom come."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BEGINNINGS OF PHARISAISM

(Pss. v., xvii., xxvi.)

It is difficult to get back to the absolute beginning of any subtle spiritual thing ; that is always true, and in those far-off days such analysis was not attempted, and men had not dreamed of glorifying " psychology." Pride in oneself, narrowness towards others, self-satisfaction, even in the presence of God ; these are primitive and age-long features of the human soul in its fight for freedom and its movement towards the highest life. But the form that these take in a particular soil, at a certain stage of civilisation, and under the influence of a special creed, may be made the subject of careful study. We may thus learn how human a man is when he claims to have a monopoly of the divine, and how the lower weakness clings to the highest type of theological attainment. We may also learn how much we owe to types of thought and classes of men that we had learned to criticise most sharply and judge most severely. In fact, one of the most welcome results of critical study should be to soften the abrupt contrasts and harsh judgments of popular history. The weakness that we criticise is one into which we ourselves easily fall, and the men whose faults stand out most clearly

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are in many cases men who have made a real contribution to the problems of life.

Men in all regions of fierce controversy, as in politics and religion, are apt to deal in watchwords overmuch, and into such names as "Pharisee" or "Puritan" they have poured richly of their pride or scorn. Round such titles there have been concentrated the passionate controversies of particular generations, when those generations were contending about the way in which they should apply the teaching of the past to the life of their own time. We to-day can appreciate the work done by the Puritans of our own race, though we see quite clearly their limitations. We may wish that they had been less like the fierce Jewish zealots, and had been able to combine with their strong love of liberty and fierce hatred of tyranny, something of the chivalry and graceful culture of their opponents, but we can never forget that in their battle for freedom they made a valuable contribution to the world's highest life. With the Pharisees we have even less sympathy, and we have judged them more harshly. We have dwelt too exclusively on the New Testament side of the picture, and even there we have forgotten the height of self-sacrifice to which men of that class could rise when touched by Christian influence. We think of them too largely in the light of our Lord's sharp denunciation of intolerance and hypocrisy. They stand before us as the incarnation of harsh dogmatism and narrow sectarianism. They were the class who in Jewish life stood most strongly for religion on its intellectual and spiritual side.

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They believed in a Church that was to be kept free from worldly politics and they cherished great hopes for the future. They were in the supreme sense the religious party, and the growth of such a party can only be understood in the light of history.

“A party,” however great its principles may be, suffers from the conflicts that it has to sustain; it suffers even in rendering high service. Almost two centuries before the Christian era the ancestors of these Pharisees had to fight for the preservation of those books and of that religion which we prize so highly. Religious persecution and the desecration of the temple roused a fierce spirit of revolt in the nation, but those who faced martyrdom most willingly were those who were devoted to the Law and believed themselves to be God’s chosen ones and “saints.” The opposition between “saints” and “sinners” had ceased to be an opposition between Jew and Gentile, and had become a mark of cleavage within the nation, between the lax worldly men who were often rich and arrogant (xvii. 14) and the devout zealous students of the law. The name that “the pious” claimed for themselves, “the godly” (xxxii. 6; xliii. 1), had a noble history. *Chesed* was the great word of Hosea (vi. 6) and represented the true spirit of religion which is expressed in love and loyalty and which God demands rather than sacrifice. From the same root comes *chasid*, “the godly one,” which became the name of that party which in New Testament times we know as the Pharisees. Nehemiah in his patriotism and religious zeal is a fine specimen of the stronger members of this class. Note his

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recital of energetic effort on behalf of religious purity and his prayer that these things may be remembered in his favour (Neh. xiii.). Only by the intense devotion and heroic service of such men could the Jewish Church have been built and the great contribution from the past handed down to us in such rich forms. The scars that men received in the age-long strife should rather excite sympathy than sarcasm. The godly ones, the pious, the puritans may contract unlovely features through the fierce fight for existence and freedom ; then the name Pharisee may lose something of its charm ; it may be taken to mean " separation " from the common needs, the daily sorrows and kindly ministries of human life ; then the world forgets that it did once really mean a " separation " from carelessness, frivolity and vice. The fierce controversies in which our fathers delighted over " faith " and " works," " free will " and " fate," seem to us now to be strangely distant and unreal. This may be because we have become indifferent, and under-estimate the intellectual side of religion, or because we believe that we have seized the essential elements of both sides and expressed them in a higher faith. The phrase,

Merit lives from man to man,
But not from man, O Lord, to Thee,

seems to supersede many theological subtleties, and the statement,

Our wills are ours, we know not how,
Our wills are ours to make them Thine,

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gives a certain measure of intellectual satisfaction as well as spiritual rest. Further we have come to realise that there may be a considerable measure of intellectual and temperamental difference among those who have substantially the same faith. But it may conduce to humility on our part to remember that indifference to the great problems of life is not a great achievement or that the higher position, if we have attained such, has only been made possible by the strife of men who were quite as strong in intellect as ourselves, and probably a little more serious in spirit. The germ of what we call "the Pharisaic spirit" seems to lie in the conviction that the truth has been attained and the right mode of conduct reached so that the relationship of the soul is secure. This leads to a sharp separation of oneself from the careless and godless; with this may go not only a fiery zeal but a hardness of temper and contempt for ignorance and weakness.

In the post-exilic Jewish period, there were for earnest men two centres of attachment—the temple with the joy and beauty of its worship, and the Law with its detailed programme of religious conduct. The Psalter is one of the greatest witnesses that the Jews in this period were not completely enslaved by formalism and dogmatism, it throbs with the movement of living experience; its great poems are alive with genuine religious passion, and yet it is in this very book where we find traces of that attitude of soul which later we call Pharisaic. The Apostle Paul's strong contrast between "the Law" and "the gospel" is not a contrast between the Old and New Testaments, but

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between that slavery to external law and ceremonial tradition, which had been hardened by the conflicts with Hellenism and Sadduceeism, and the free spirit of the gospel. There are many "evangelical" elements in the Old Testament and not least in the book of Psalms. In Ps. v., and others of a similar class, we are hampered by our lack of clear knowledge of the precise circumstances out of which they sprung and of the characters of the parties involved. But it seems to imply unrest and strife within the Jewish community. In the temple, early in the morning, the saint offers his prayer and rejoices that he can thus proclaim his separation from wicked men (Luke xviii. 10). Of one thing he is sure, that the arrogant wicked man cannot be a guest or client in God's holy palace. There is no full confession of his own sin or specific prayer for himself. The description and denunciation of wicked men is full and strong. The Apostle Paul uses such descriptions, quoted from various psalms, to express the universal sinfulness of Jew and Greek, that calls for penitence and needs pardon. The evils of insincerity, unreliability, flattering deceit and brazen arrogance are real and hurtful, but if we find them incarnate in our opponents, we must watch against the same dangers in ourselves. In times of strife we realise how easy it is to pray against our enemies and how difficult to attain the spirit of the highest prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The temple is for the saint a shelter in danger, a source of strength in need, but if there is in it the true Christian atmosphere, the words "God

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hates sinners and I hate them ” cannot be the final creed.

In Ps. xvii. we have a similar type of thought, the poet appeals for judgment and defence on account of his strict righteousness and perfect sincerity. He has been proved and tested and his God has found nothing amiss in him. Because he has kept himself from the ways of the violent he desires to be kept as “ the apple of the eye.” It has been suggested that in *v.* 4 originally the Hebrew word stood which means “ separated ” (later Pharisee) so that instead of “ I have kept from the ways of the violent, i.e., robbers or murderers,” we should read “ I have observed the ways of the separated ones.” While this is uncertain it harmonises better than the present text with the claim to perfect purity in thought and speech. Here we have the common contrast, the pious are set over against the wicked oppressors and deadly enemies. As elsewhere the wicked are represented as coarse, prosperous and arrogant. The exact terms in which he speaks of “ the men of the world ” are not clear, but it is evident that he is content that they should have their portion in this life, satiated with earthly good, while he can look forward to a richer satisfaction in the presence of God. He has a scornful contempt for the things that satisfy worldlings. Their prosperity may be their ruin, but his hope is to see the face of God. Thus he solves the problem of life’s conflict, and can say with the author of Ps. xvi. 2, that his prosperity is not apart from God. His delight is in communion with God and in the community of the saints.

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xxvi. is the perfect type of this class of psalm. " This profession of integrity is not so inappropriate as many moderns think. It is not self-righteousness. It is not so much self-conscious as conscious of the divine presence and the requirements that invoke it " (Briggs). That remark may be quite correct from an apologetic standpoint, but we are not now so much concerned with defending as understanding the poet. It is no harsh reflection upon the writer to note that his attitude differs from that of the prophets of the earlier time as well as from that of a penitent soul to-day. This man does not cry " out of the depths," there is no perplexing problem or spiritual agony in his poem. The Church and the Law are the centre of his thought and the source of his joy, and his relation to these gives a satisfaction in his own position as well as a sense of truth in God. If we follow this distinguished commentator (Briggs) in his drastic metrical treatment, a doubtful procedure, regarding *vv.* 7, 9-11 as a churchly addition, we may gain " simplicity and symmetry " but we are left face to face with a soul that can assert its " integrity," its satisfactory issue from a divine testing, its habit of avoiding the company of " worthless men " (cf. Ps. i.), its hatred of the assembly of evil doers, and determination to " wash my hands in innocency " (contrast Ps. lxxiii.), and take a proud position in the Church choir. This is what we may call average Judaism, it may become narrow, conventional and even hard; but one thing is certain, that there are depths of passion and heights of piety that it does not comprehend. Yet seeing that the

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world is full of commonplace people, this attitude keeps the machinery of the Church together, though we need something more adventurous, some larger vision, some more eager longing, some deeper trouble, to keep it from becoming a mere machine.

CHAPTER XXX
THE GREAT PERSECUTION
(Pss. xliv., lxxiv., lxxix.)

It is not possible in connection with this exposition to discuss in detail the question of Maccabean Psalms, but if there are any belonging to that period these three seem to have the strongest claim to that title ; (Others for which the same claim has been made are liv., lv., lx., cxl., cxli.). Recently it has been maintained that these three are earlier psalms that have been enlarged and adapted by a Maccabean editor to the events of his own time. Such a process is not in itself impossible, but the attempt to separate the different elements with such absolute precision is certainly not lacking in boldness. On this view, we have statements of the following nature singled out as Maccabean in character and spirit :

All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten Thee,
Neither have we dealt falsely with Thy covenant.

If we have forgotten the name of our God,
Or spread forth our hands to a strange god,
Shall not God search this out ?
For He knoweth the secrets of the heart.

(xliv. 17, 20, 21)

They set up their signs as signs,
They appeared as men that lifted up
Axes on a thicket of trees ;
And now all the carved work thereof together
They break down with hatchet and hammers.

(lxxiv. 4 ff.).

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Their blood has been shed like water round about Jerusalem ;
And there was none to bury them.
Render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom ;
Their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord.
(lxxix. 3, 12.)

On this theory, it is still true that the terrible suffering at the time of " the Greek peril " has left its marks on these songs, even if some of the bitter complaints had been wrung from the hearts of patriotic poets in the earlier days of defeat and shame. The ordinary reader and the average preacher cannot be expected to examine with any thoroughness criticism of this subtle kind, and it is certain that there will never be general agreement even among experts on such fine points. When so many interpolations and additions of a very late style are recognised by one who discovers an earlier kernel, it is no wonder that scholars for many generations have regarded these poems as expressions of national sorrow at a time when the Jewish religion was fighting for its life against apostates within and persecutors without. But what we are concerned with now is not criticism, but life, and only with criticism as it reveals the struggling life and advancing thought of bygone centuries.

The fact that there is diversity of opinion as to the particular catastrophe reflected in these psalms reminds us that the Hebrew people gained their place in history, and their special form of discipline or culture, only through long centuries of painful conflicts, which varied in their form but always involved internal strife as well as external warfare. This is

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the ultimate mystery of the world process, a mystery with which we cannot wrestle here, that out of such a fiery furnace the fine gold of truth has come, bearing marks of the tremendous heat that was needed to separate the precious from the vile.

All these psalms are expressions of national faith and national sorrow. A longing glance is cast towards the past in which great deeds had been wrought, leaving behind a long trail of precious memories. The Hebrew long ago set us the example of cherishing the memory and singing the praises of great men (The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach xliv., Heb. xi). But these men were always regarded as heroes of faith, and there was always the qualification, "Neither did their own arm save them: but Thy right hand and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance" (xliv. 3). This contrast is both oppressive and helpful; that they should have the faith to declare

"God is my King of old,
Working salvation in the midst of the earth."

"The day is Thine, the night also is Thine;
Thou hast prepared the light and the sun";

and yet be compelled to cry

"O God, why hast Thou cast us off for ever?"

Why doth Thine anger smoke against the sheep of Thy
pasture?"

This is the strange contradiction that puzzles and stimulates thought. Indeed we may say that it is against the dark background of national disaster that the true faith shines out and shows its unconquerable strength. The men who lived through

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those fierce storms and who instead of being crushed by them persisted in creating splendid pictures of redemption and a "new age" of righteousness and peace, have sometimes been called "pessimists." But we must not by that name class them with modern men who, with a more wonderful view of nature, and a larger perspective of history before their eyes, lose faith in any real meaning and order of the world. Those men kept their faith when their world was falling to pieces, though in some respects their form of expressing it may seem fantastic to us.

If these poems were not formed by one creative stroke but show that varied material was used in a somewhat painful fashion, mingling the old and new, the memory of the past and reflection on the present, that is another reminder of the fact that down nearly to the time of the Christian era this literature was still a living stream, it had not all of it become "sacred" in the hard, dogmatic sense. It was still flexible and adaptable. The last great conflict and upheaval in the Old Testament period was the Maccabean revolt against the attempt of the Syrian Emperor Antiochus Epiphanes to impose upon Judæa a bastard Greek worship and culture. It divided the community, it showed the passionate zeal of true patriots for the Law, it led to a revival of military power in this small nation, and prepared the way for the conditions and classes that prevailed at the time of our Lord's coming. In one sense it may be called the first great religious persecution. One expositor, who possessed a fine rhetorical gift, said,

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“ Jezebel stands out on the page of sacred history as the first supporter of *religious persecution*. We learn from incidental notices that, not content with insulting the religion of the nation by the burdensome magnificence of her idolatrous establishments, she made an attempt to crush Jehovah worship altogether. Such fanaticism is a pregnant concomitant of guilt. She is the authentic authoress of priestly inquisitions.” Some would go a long way farther back and find traces of theological intolerance and religious conflict in the story of Cain and Abel. Acknowledging the fact that the history of religious movements is marred by intolerance and strife, what we mean is that in this late period we have, on a large scale, fierce conflict between two highly developed but different forms of “ culture.” When the city was destroyed and the temple burned by the Babylonians early in the sixth century, B.C., that was a political struggle. Judah and other small nations were involved in a war with the immense Babylonian Empire, and were crushed under the heel of a great military power. The religion had then its difficulties, but they were of a kind that tended to deepen thought and bring into relief the universal elements. Babylon did not set out to destroy definitely the Hebrew religion but mainly to assert its own political supremacy. During the Persian rule Judæa, though a subject province, was left free to manage its own religious affairs, and in the first century of Greek rule under the Ptolemies it was not a case of brutal attack but of peaceful penetration. At the beginning of the second century B.C. the situation changed.

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Greek influence, intellectual, artistic and athletic, had been at work in quiet subtle ways, so that when it came in the form of violence it met a divided nation. Then it was shown that the painful discipline under the Law had not only prepared men to write laboured meditations, such as Ps. cxix., but had produced a character, a type of "saint," that could withstand the sternest pressure. These men had to fight for "the Book" in a new sense; they saved it for themselves and for us. The strictest party desired to fight, not for political power, but only for freedom to exercise their religion. But men are driven along by events that are too strong for them, and national movements are difficult to keep pure. The two forms of culture that we call Hebraism and Hellenism influence each other, and Judaism even in its hardest forms felt some touch of the subtle Greek influence.

The specific fact for us is that this last national tragedy of Judaism, before the final loss of the temple, has left its mark on the Psalter; once more the cry was extorted "Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God?" This was ever a real cry, wrung from men by the pain of disappointment and the torture of persecution. It was not the worship of beauty and gracefulness that came to us from such men, not the pursuit of art for its own sake, or of religion as a sensuous attraction and enjoyment, but the recognition of righteousness as the will of God, binding upon man and ruling the world. The saint submitted himself to this rule, but confronted a lawless world; so he cried, "Lord, how long?" and waited in hope for the divine Kingdom.

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This is the secret of power in this wonderful book, not simply that God speaks in it, but that He speaks through men who with all their imperfections are fighting real battles, battles which have played their part in helping the world's thought to a higher level. They lived in rough times and endured great sufferings ; their songs and prayers vibrate with genuine passion. Remembering this we understand how the Psalter has been not only a book for students interested in literature and theology, but a treasury for those who in later ages have fought the battles of freedom and suffered the sharpest persecutions. Its words have been pondered in lonely cells, chanted in the great cathedrals ; in the face of age-long tyrannies men have cried " Lord, how long ? " in their darkest hours they have been driven to the throne of their God with the words, " Why hast Thou forsaken me ? " or they have faced the crisis of battle singing bravely, " Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered."

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“The Messages of the Psalmists,” by John Edgar McFadyen, M.A., D.D., pp. 329 (James Clarke & Co., 1916.) Besides a neat introduction the book contains a paraphrase of each psalm, based on critical study and couched in graceful language. It has also a good bibliography of the expository literature.

“The Prayers of the Bible,” by Professor J. E. McFadyen, pp. 388 (Hodder and Stoughton). This book is a careful study of the Bible on its devotional side, and contains references from this point of view to a large number of Psalms.

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